

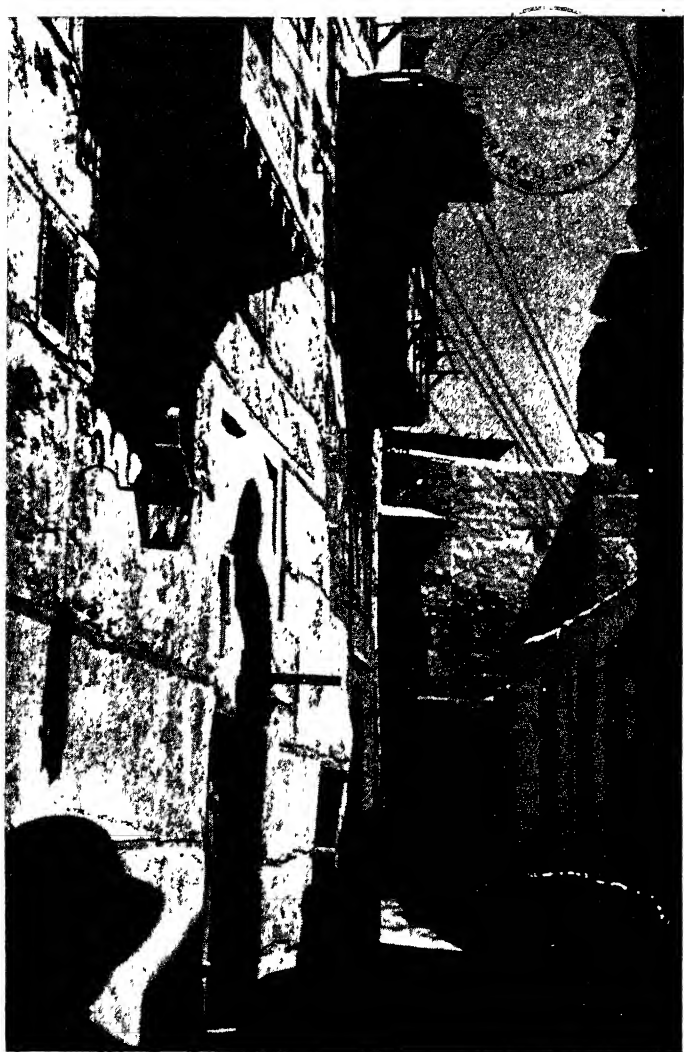
THE RIDDLE OF ARABIA

By the same Author :

ABYSSINIA ON THE EVE (*15th Thousand*)

PALESTINE ON THE EVE (*7th Thousand*)

ABYSSINIA STOP PRESS (*Editor*)



A STREET IN JEDDAH

THE RIDDLE OF ARABIA

By LADISLAS FARAGO



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“ . . . And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.

“And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared ; and the Egyptians fled against it ; and the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.

“And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, *and* all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them : there remained not so much as one of them.

“But the children of Israel walked upon dry *land* in the midst of the sea ; and the waters *were* a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. . . .”

Exodus xiv, 26-29.

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THE RIDDLE OF ARABIA

CHAPTER I

SOUTH—AND NORTH—OF SUEZ

THE tiny space in my calendar reserved for February 16th, 1937, was filled with :

- Find Yemen on map.
- Trace consular representative.
- Get visa for Aden.
- Insurance.
- Try get advance from Drawbell.
- Meet Klar.

I found Yemen on the map quickly enough. There she was, just one square inch, a tiny yellow spot situated in the southernmost part of the Arabian Peninsula in my little *Bartholomew's Pocket Atlas of the World*. But I had to spend the day, the next day, and a couple of days more, only to discover that Yemen had no envoy, no ambassador, no consul, not even an honorary one, in London, in Europe or anywhere in the world. So I went to His Majesty's Passport Office instead, to obtain a permit for Aden, which—I was told—was the Door to Yemen.

The passport officer examined my passport and my application, then he looked up at me and said :

"So you want to go to the Yemen? Why on earth do you want to go there?"

I told him that it was my intention to write a book about the trip after my return.

"I suppose you know," he said, "that the Yemen is an uncivilized, dangerous and troublesome country?" He informed me that before granting a transit visa for a trip to the Yemen he would have to consult the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office and His Excellency the Governor of Aden. He promised me a quick decision: "In about a fortnight you'll know where you are," he said; and I was dismissed.

Over the telephone I consulted my insurance broker. I told him that I was leaving for the Yemen and that I should like to take out insurance for the trip. He exclaimed: "*Where* the hell are you going?"

"To the Yemen—the Y-E-M-E-N!" I shouted back, spelling out each letter carefully.

"Never heard of it," the broker said, "but I'll try my best."

Half an hour later he called me back. "Listen," he said, somewhat disturbed. "Lloyd's won't accept any insurance for Spain and the Balkan States. Is this Yemen of yours in the Balkans?" I told him, "No, not exactly. It's an independent kingdom in Southern Arabia." He asked me to see his underwriter. Finally I got terms. For an insurance of £2,000 I had to pay only thirty-two shillings, while but a few months earlier I paid more than £20 for the same amount when going to Spain. Civilized Europe has become definitely less safe than the deserts of Arabia. •

Mr. James Drawbell, editor of the London *Sunday Chronicle*, the paper for which I worked as "roving foreign correspondent", was not at all enthusiastic about my project. For the past three years he had sent me to almost every world event: from the wars in Abyssinia, Palestine and Spain to the engagement of Princess Juliana, from the sit-down strike of Hungarian miners to the arrival

of Harry Richman in Yorkshire. But he remained stubborn about the Yemen. Consequently I could not get an advance on what he considered a mad enterprise.

"What the devil do you want in the Yemen?" he yelled. "There is no angle in a story like that. Here's a good story, in Czechoslovakia, the aerodromes of which the Germans say are in fact Russian emergency landing-fields. Go and get it, you have my blessing. But the Yemen? Please try to be sensible!"

I still preferred the Yemen to Russian aerodromes, and went to see the last hope of this fruitless day. For weeks I had been trying hard to find somebody who had some knowledge of the Yemen. All my efforts were in vain. The available books were all out of date, and even British officials who served in the Near East proved to be unhelpful as far as the Yemen was concerned. I visited the British officer who had been the superior of Lawrence of Arabia during the World War and who had spent the better half of his life in countries around the Red Sea. He received me in his huge drawing-room, surrounded with his memories and furniture of the Victorian period. The walls of the room were covered with pictures of Lawrence, with rare Arab swords and other Near Eastern relics—but of the Yemen the General could give no information.

When I had given up hope of learning anything about this remote country before seeing it for myself, I met—by lucky chance—Monsieur Klar. He was neither a retired British officer nor a Government official. He had come to London from Paris to buy furs at the auction of the Hudson Bay Company. He was a furrier. He was born, some sixty years ago, in one of the many Polish ghettos, and went to Paris to try his luck. From the dark and narrow alleys of his native ghetto he stepped out into the bright

shining light of the wide world. He travelled much. He went to Canada to buy silver foxes, to China for mink, to Russia for Persian lamb, to Abyssinia for leopardskins. The Yemen was his work of art, a country which he discovered from the furrier's point of view.

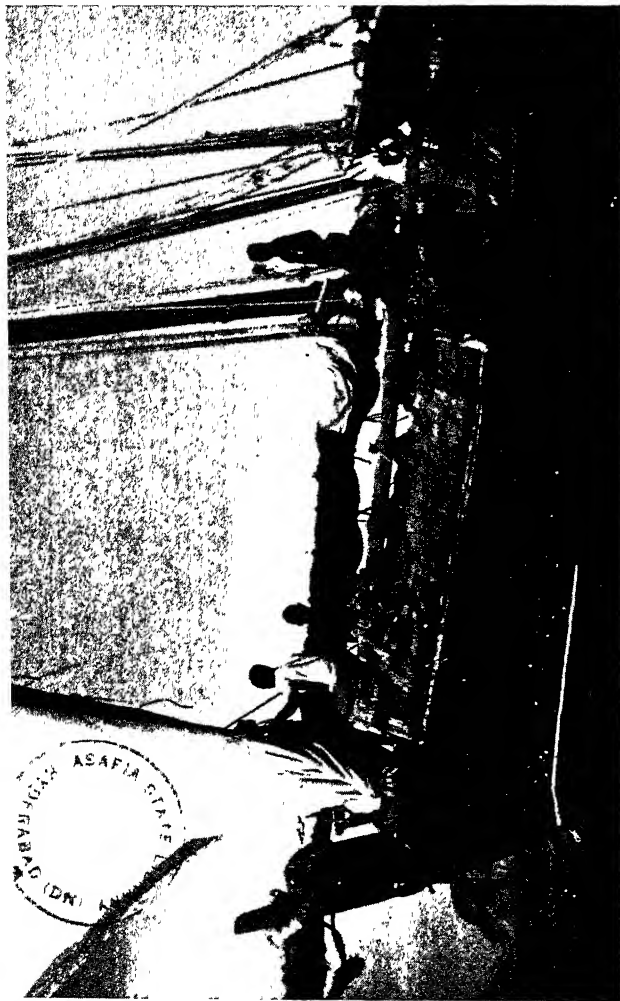
"On a journey back from India," he said, "I saw strange goats herded in the harbour of Aden. I liked their skins, and brought a sample back to Paris. We worked on the skin, prepared and dyed it. My expectations were confirmed. The stuff promised to become a hit. A few months ago I went to the Yemen to buy thousands of these skins." He had found a fortune in the Yemen, and yet he had a sinister story to tell about the country.

"On the door of the Yemen is written what Dante wrote on the door of Hell: '*Lasciate ogni speranza*'—Give up all hope!" he said. "The Yemen is the Tibet of the Near East. There are three million people living within her boundaries, but less than thirty of them have ever been outside. There is not a single inch of railway, no electric light, and there are only three doctors in the whole land. No great ships ever call at her ports; there are no hotels to shelter visitors. You can't smoke and you can't drink once you set foot on Yemenite soil—and you can't look at the women. Don't expect comfort and kindness in this land of the Truest Believers. And above all, change your profession. There are three professions which Yemenites won't tolerate: journalists, professors, and writers. They are always and inevitably British spies."

He volunteered to help me. He gave me a letter of introduction to his agent at Hodeida, the chief port of the Yemen, in which he stated that I was a fur merchant and his representative. Without Monsieur Klar's letter I would never have reached the forbidden shores of the Yemen.



PORT SAID TYPES



A DHOW FROM THE HADRAMAUT

My visa for Aden came through sooner than I expected. However, I had to sign a strange document. In this I declared that I was travelling entirely at my own risk and responsibility. His Majesty's Government was not to be held responsible for any loss or hardship I might suffer during my journey. It was a lengthy ceremony and the passport officer gave me an additional warning: "Don't expect us" (he meant the British Empire) "to send a warship for you if you get marooned!"

Next morning I flew to Naples, and sailed on the Orient Line steamer *Orford* to Aden.

This was my third trip through the Suez Canal to the Red Sea in two years. Now I greeted the refractory currents and the rocky islands as old acquaintances. I knew every wave of those glittering waters. Within me kept repeating: "What makes me come to this remote place? What strange urge drives me, again and again, to this Biblical sea?"

On my previous trips, bound for Abyssinia, I was always attracted by the silent glory of these waters. Passing through the Red Sea, I saw in the distance the grey contours of Mount Sinai, the undulating Biblical landscape, the unbroken sands of the Libyan desert, gloomy and bare. I saw stone, rocks and sand. No men, no beasts, no vegetation. And yet, looking out into the hazy atmosphere, I caught myself longing for those dark mountains and the lifeless desert.

—This coast had once been the twin brother of our own civilization. But while our European culture bloomed and flourished, Arab culture remained an eternal child, undeveloped and backward. To me Arabia was a Sleeping Beauty.

Three years ago I had a hunch and had gone to Abyssinia. Three months after my visit Italy invaded that unfortunate country. Now I had a hunch again. A few months ago, in the King David Hotel in

Jerusalem, I had met two men who I later learned were closely connected with the British Secret Service. They told me that they were passing through Jerusalem on their way to the south of Arabia to counteract the ever-increasing Italian propaganda. Shortly afterwards, in Rome, I found out about Italy's plans for the coming years. It was no secret in Rome that Mussolini was not content with his success in Ethiopia. He was determined to continue a policy of expansion. That was what he meant when he said at Milan, in December 1936: "The Abyssinian campaign is over; but a great deal more remains to be done."

Abyssinia is regarded as only one constituent in Il Duce's Roman Empire. He means to expand that Empire by the addition of other countries. His adviser informed him that the independent, untouched kingdom of Yemen would be easy prey.

Apart from these political considerations, I was thrilled by the adventures of three men who, in the last century, had explored the Arabian Peninsula. I longed to recreate for myself their world of adventure.

Gifford Palgrave, baptized Jew, officer of the East India Company, pacemaker of British imperialism, was one of them. Palgrave was a restless, over-zealous man with a supercharged temperament. Service with the East India Company was a boring affair to him: too much routine. He soon left India, went to Syria, and entered the Jesuit order to become a missionary. His sudden religious fervour had a dubious background. At that time, about 1860, the French had ambitious plans, similar to the present-day plans of the Italians. Napoleon III was toying with imperialism; he was trying to get a foothold in Syria, in Egypt, and—hardly more than a feeble dream—on the Arabian Peninsula.

Palgrave was Napoleon's man. The Emperor sent him to Arabia to spread Christianity among the

True Believers, and to win them over to Napoleon's side. Travelling as a Damascus Arab, Palgrave penetrated territories which no European had ever before seen. What became of his mission nobody knows. The Franco-Prussian War of 1870 shattered Napoleon's imperialistic dream. Palgrave returned, with no Arabs converted and no country captured for the French. But he brought back material for one of the most fascinating accounts of Arabia, a book full of adventure and wisdom.

Napoleon did not trust this political tramp. Shortly after Palgrave left Damascus, a second agent of the Emperor was sent to Arabia, an Italian, Carlo Guarmani. The official explanation of his mission was to buy horses for the French Army. This horse business was, in fact, a Trojan horse: to smuggle French influence into Arabia. Disguised as a Turkish trader, Guarmani wandered through the desert to Taima, Khaybar, high up to the mountains of Sammar. He won friends wherever he went, and on his return gave us the first reliable account of Arabia.

Charles Doughty, who followed Palgrave and Guarmani into the desert, refused to disguise himself and his aims. He travelled as an Englishman and a Christian from Syria to the Nej, to Hejaz, finally with a caravan transporting butter to Mecca, and reached the walls of the Holy City. He was not allowed to enter the town of the Kaba, and even his presence in the vicinity of the sacred walls infuriated the fanatic Moslems. A religious mob attacked Doughty. They tried to kill him—this dog of a Christian who had sullied the sacred soil with his presence. They beat him until he lay unconscious—left for dead by the Arabs. The Sherif of Taif, a Samaritan Arab, found him still breathing. The Arab nursed the Englishman back to life. Then took him to Jeddah, to freedom.

These three and many others returned from Arabia, their purpose unachieved. Those who set out to convert the Arabs came back themselves Mohammedans. Those who went on secret political missions to win the fealty of Arab peoples to European powers remained to become advisers of those Arab kings whose downfall they had planned.

I was reading Doughty's book, *Arabia Deserta*, and envisaging the difficulties of his journey, when my fast and comfortable boat reached Port Said. The next morning, in the rising sun of the Egyptian dawn, we entered the Suez Canal. From the reddish grey haze of the dawn the bronze statue of Ferdinand de Lesseps emerged with majestic beauty. Contrasting with the inert dignity of this enterprising Frenchman was the steady pacing of a private of the Suez Canal Patrol, in his khaki uniform, rifle on shoulder, the sentry of British Empire—symbolic figures of the past and present of the Suez Canal.

The Canal opened up Arabia to European travellers. Today it takes only six days from a Mediterranean port to Aden. For people in the diplomatic drawing-rooms this fact has merely sentimental value. The real great political significance of the Canal is that it is the waterway which connects England with her Indian and Australian dominions, and—since the conquest of Abyssinia—the life-line of Roman Empire to Il Duce's African possessions.

The *Orford* cut her speed. We slowed down to four knots to avoid making waves which might endanger the artificial banks of the Canal cut into the soft sandy land of the surrounding desert. At Ismailia we came to a full stop. The lower section of the Canal was occupied. Through my field-glasses I could see a line of tiny boats departing towards the Red Sea. They were three Italian submarines, of the pocket size. Later, when we reached the open sea

in the Gulf of Suez, we met them again. They were sailing under half steam, close to the Arabian coast. The British passengers of the *Orford* scrutinized these "little wops" with unconcealed embarrassment. An English naval engineer, a fellow passenger, told me :

"It is the first time in history that submarines are stationed in the Red Sea. Recently Italy opened a huge submarine base in the vicinity of Massawa, Eritrea. They have no defensive value," he added reproachfully, "since there is no fleet in the Red Sea against which this defence would be needed. The few French and British yachtlike gunboats stationed in the Sea hunt only slave-traders, and patrol the Red Sea more or less as traffic police for the innumerable native dhows which sail from coast to coast. And yet Italy concentrates almost half of her submarine fleet in the Red Sea ; I believe, some forty units."

The presence of these Italian pocket submarines meant the electric tension of an approaching conflict which no statesmanship would be able to avoid.

We sailed much faster than the submarines, and soon lost them beyond the horizon ; the whole uncanny encounter was forgotten.

Later I was reading the Bible, a fitting guide-book for a trip through the Red Sea. I read the passage where the Jews, pursued by the Pharaoh's horsemen and chariots, miraculously crossed the Sea. ~~Where~~ where did it actually happen? It must have been there somewhere, not very far from the spot where we met the Italian submarines.

I stopped a steward, and asked him : "Do you happen to know the spot where the Jews crossed the Sea?"

The steward looked at me in embarrassment. He gazed down to the waters, as if he were seeking the very spot, but then he confessed : "I'm sorry, sir,

I don't think I know." It was his thirty-seventh voyage through the Red Sea, but : "You see, sir, it's so dull sailing through the Red Sea ! Nothing but water for four days ! Water looks alike everywhere. D'you want a lemon squash, sir ?"

The purser did not know either. And there was no reference in the books of the ship's library. Eventually, back on the promenade deck, I found the man to satisfy my curiosity. Pacing up and down, I met an Anglican minister, a white-haired, kind-looking, elderly gentleman who was also engrossed in the Bible. I asked him my question, and the friendly look vanished from his eye. He slammed his Bible shut, and in an uncertain voice said : "I'm afraid I don't know." He disappeared to play a round of deck-tennis.

The Red Sea is in fact a forgotten sea. Thousands of travellers sail through it regularly, but for most of them it is just an endless body of water. Their floating hotels pass swiftly through the sea. Passengers are flat and insipid during the days : the powerful tropical sun, the sudden heat dries them up. But when night falls, and the millions of stars of the southern sky are switched on, these apparently lifeless, dignified corpses become frolicsome, sportive and gay. They behave according to the laws of passengerdom. They sit at the bar and drink double-whisky, Martini, or the different members of the Collins family. They dance in the great saloon, under Chinese lanterns, heedless of the natural beauty of the stars. Or they seek dark corners to continue the temporary romances which commenced with the first night aboard, and will certainly end with the captain's dinner. To the Sea itself they give no thought.

Now the *Orford*, this emissary of European civilization, floated but a few miles from the barren Arabian coasts. Aboard were all the conveniences and marvels

of our mechanical age of which Arabia has nothing. Sometimes, when the sea narrowed and the boat came closer to shore, I thought I could see shadows of men standing on the eastern bank, staring at this floating wonder. The light breeze of a perfect night transmitted to them the swing tune from the ship's loudspeaker. I envied those men standing on the shore, staring at the light of which they had none; just as they—probably—envied us. Then and there I decided to come back to the sea, not in a luxurious liner but in one of the native dhows, which had sailed the Red Sea since time immemorial. A few weeks later I kept my date.

CHAPTER II

GRAND HOTEL ORIENT

THE fifth morning of our journey we passed through the Bab-el-Mandeb, the narrow strait leading out to the Indian Ocean which the Arabs call—befittingly—the Gate of Afflictions. To our right was the African shore, to our left Asia, both clearly visible in the glaring brightness of the beautiful spring morning. It was not too hot, and a light breeze had come up as we entered the Gulf of Aden, refreshing us after the four sultry days in the Red Sea kettle.

Beyond the strait the boat took a sharp eastern course. We left Africa behind, the shores slowly sinking beyond the horizon. As we approached the mainland of Arabia Aden looked like the hottest and driest of rocks behind a transparent haze which resembled the light veil of emancipated Moslem women. The town itself was hidden in the lap of the volcanic rocks, the colours of which changed with moody rapidity. Now they were bluish, like a sky painted on a Hollywood prop. Then suddenly they turned brown, like the robes of Franciscan monks. And as we came quite close, they became just black. This entire landscape was both heroic and gloomy. Yet its merciless barrenness was softened by an eternally blue sky and the warm playful breeze rising from the waters.

This breeze is the bloodstream of Aden, the making of Aden through the ages. When trade moved by

sail the regular winds made it easy for dhows heavily laden with skins and ivory from Somaliland, or with the spices and silks of Asia on the return voyage, to sail across the straits in either direction. Because of this breeze Aden was the gateway through which the caravan routes of the East converged on Equatorial Africa, while the ships carrying the trade of India called at Aden, just as all the Far Eastern and South African lines call there today.

Today Aden is an important refuelling station where ships refresh their stocks of coal, fuel and water. Passengers leave the boats for a few hours to become the helpless victims of Aden's Main Street pirates. Rare are visitors who come to stay.

Beside myself, there was only one other passenger aboard the *Orford* bound for Aden. She was the wife of a British medical officer. Our trunks were already on the disembarking deck when we took the pilot aboard and slowly entered Aden Bay. Suddenly the town became visible. In the morning's blinding glare the whitewashed houses shone like tiny suns. Framed by the darkness of the rocks, the city looked like white paint thrown haphazardly on canvas. Everything appeared orderly, slow, dignified. The streets were clean and almost noiseless.

It was a dull arrival at first. There was nothing of the deafening cries of Egyptian traders; no gala-gala men who magically produce frightened chicks from the mouths of no less frightened onlookers. No discreet offers of "hot Oriental girls", no French postcards, no Greek aphrodisiacs. There were no secret attractions offered in dirty side-streets, which usually proved to be just as counterfeit as the money which the innocent got back in change.

Aden is sober and civil, sluggish and indolent, tedious and dignified. Aden is a British colony.

The harbour authorities were represented by a

doctor of the quarantine station and a police officer. Both were Europeans. Accordingly, native servants carried the appurtenances of their offices. Each had three servants for the purpose. One for the official books (he was the master of the next two servants), another for the rubber stamps (who, again, was the superior of the next), and a third for the ink-pad. I was still answering the questions of the policeman when a swift motor-launch approached us, filled with gesticulating, shouting, excited dusky gentlemen. The air was suddenly filled with the voices of the Orient. These men invaded the boat, and when they found out that I was the only one visiting Aden (my shipmate, the medical officer's wife, was home), these amalgamated and associated hotel touts of Aden stormed me.

There were eleven touts altogether. They clamoured and cried a unique language, made up of Arabic, Abyssinian, French, Italian and German words, the whole mixture spoken with an English accent. Among the touts steadily buzzing around me I saw a sad-faced dark man who seemed familiar. He too wore a hotel cap; he too was a tout. But he did not participate in this clamouring fight for the one and only passenger.

This man stood aside, helplessly trying to utter a word, opening his mouth, making an effort to speak—but then giving it up before he had said a word. It was clear he was a stranger, but where on earth could I have met him before?

I shook off the other touts and went straight up to the little man. "Where did we meet before?"

He was surprised. "I dunno, sir," he muttered shyly. "I'm new here, sir. I'm from Abyssinia." Then I remembered. He was Ato Tamaru, formerly a kind of Under-Secretary in the Finance Ministry at Addis Ababa. I had met him only two years ago, still in

high office and still optimistic. But since then Italy had conquered his country, and Ato Tamaru had to flee.

Ato Tamaru came to Aden and made a meagre living by touting foreigners for hotels and curio shops. I found many former Abyssinian notables around the Red Sea who, just like the Russian aristocrats after the October Revolution, tried their hands at doubtful professions. They lived in absolute poverty. A few weeks later, crossing from Jibuti to Aden, I met Abyssinia's former League of Nations delegate, His Excellency Tekla Hawariat. He was a steerage passenger on one of the tiny steamers which ferry the natives from Aden to the African ports, and vice versa. He slept on deck, on dirty rags and torn blankets, and ate nothing during the thirty-six hours of the crossing. When I discovered him I tried to get him over to the semi-luxury of the first-class. Tekla Hawariat refused. He said, "I'm perfectly happy where I am!" His refusal was smiling and soft, yet firm. He hates all Europeans; Italy is in Europe.

Ato Tamaru was also not very pleased by our meeting. He was ashamed of his changed fortunes. I decided to go to the Crescent Hotel, which he "represented", but he told me that the "Crescent" was completely booked up. There was only one other hotel open in Aden, the "Marina"—and all the ten excited touts were touting for it.

Strange as it seemed, Ato Tamaru explained to me the meaning of this useless competition. "These touts do their touting more or less for amusement. During the Abyssinian campaign there were six hotels open in Aden, and they were all filled with business men who made Aden their headquarters, trading with either the Abyssinians or the Italians across the water. After the war, four of the hotels closed down, but the touts stayed on." The two hotels

are owned by the same man, a Señor Pereira, of Portuguese origin. His is Aden's hotel trust.

Life in the "Marina" started promisingly. I stood under the shower in my bathroom when somebody knocked on my door. I was aware that beyond the twenty-eighth degree of latitude no Arab female would dare to enter the room of an infidel (at least not in the daytime), so I shouted, "Come in!"

In came a stout young gentleman followed by two servants, one carrying a tray with a bottle of whisky and two glasses, the other a huge book. The man introduced himself. "My name is Pereira," he said. "I'm the owner of this place. Do you mind, sir, having a drink with me? It is the custom of the house."

I was pleasantly impressed by this sign of Oriental hospitality. Pereira placed the huge book, which the second servant carried, before me. "This is our visitors' book," he said, and added that he would consider it a great honour if I would sign my name. Later I learned that it was a police regulation that every visitor must register within twenty-four hours of arrival.

Pereira came to stay. He inquired: "How long shall we have the honour of having you with us?" An honour for which he charged me £1 a day. It was originally not my intention to spend more than a few days in Aden. I wanted to leave as soon as possible for the Yemen. I consulted a few people to whom I carried letters of introduction: the Arab merchant king Sheikh Ali Baraara Omar and a wealthy tobacco manufacturer, Nicholas Athanasopoulos, who, in addition, was the London *Times* correspondent. Their information was all too discouraging. Here in the immediate neighbourhood of the Yemen, only some 160 miles from her borders, I was no closer to my goal than I had been in London.

As a customary gesture of etiquette (but also to get their help), the day after my arrival I visited the British Residency. I was received by the Resident, Sir Bernard Reilly, and his First Political Secretary, Colonel M. C. Lake, who had the M.C. also behind his name as possessor of the Military Cross. A predecessor of mine on this difficult trip, a fellow writer, Ameen Rihani, painted a sinister picture of the Residency, showing it as a hotbed of intrigue and malice. Therefore I did not expect much from my visit. But I was most pleasantly surprised. Both officials were extremely kind and helpful, and Colonel Lake, in whom I met the greatest authority on the Yemen and the problems of the Red Sea, spent hours with me trying to figure out the best way to get me into the Yemen.

"We have," Colonel Lake told me, "after many years of trouble, at last effected undisturbed relations with His Majesty the King of the Yemen." He never omitted "His Majesty" when he spoke of the ruler of the Yemen, Imam Yahya. "We are able to maintain these good relations by respecting the complete sovereignty of the King. We have no objections against your going up to the Yemen border. But beyond that border our power ceases. To enter the Yemen you'll have to get a written and sealed permit directly from His Majesty."

"But how to get in touch with him—I mean, with His Majesty?" I asked, flabbergasted at so much regard for a native ruler.

"The best thing to do," Colonel Lake went on, "is to write an application to His Majesty and send it by special messenger to Sana. In the market of the Camp" (the native city of Aden) "you'll always find Yemenite merchants going home. They'll take your letter to the Yemen. But then you'll have to wait. You may receive an answer within a fortnight, if

you're lucky. But it sometimes takes months until His Majesty replies. Forget your hurry. Remember, you're in Arabia. In the meantime look around in Aden. We have plenty of interesting sights ourselves."

For my application, Colonel Lake gave me the full name and all the titles of the Imam. "His Majesty Mohammed Yahya Hamid ed-Din Motawakkil Bin Achmed ed-Din Mohammed Mansur, Imam and King of the Yemen, Sana." This was His Majesty's postal address. His subjects have even more colourful titles for their King. They call him the "Controller of our Affairs, Prince of the Faithful, the Luminary of Creation and the Dependent upon Allah". And they do it in one breath, calling out all his pompous titles whenever they address him, and even when they only mention his name in conversation with foreigners. They fear him, for he is omnipotent—a tyrant.

I followed the suggestions of Colonel Lake. I ordered Hassan, one of the best petition writers of Aden, to come to my room. His profession was to write applications, complaints and love letters for the illiterate natives in picturesque Arabic. My application was Hassan's *chef-d'œuvre*. We composed a very humble, pathetic and poetic missive which started out with: "In the name of Allah the Merciful and Compassionate", and ended with "May Allah guide you in the Labyrinth of the right and the wrong always to the right path of which I am sure Allah has enlightened you and made you the ruler over the Faithful." Instead of ending with a polite "Very truly yours", I had to sign my name under "From your Slave".

An Arab merchant from Taiz, who was just about to return to his homeland, volunteered to take my letter as far as Taiz and then to send it on to Sana', the capital.

The letter on its way, I looked around for attractions to kill time. I found plenty in the Marina Hotel,

which I named Grand Hotel Orient, after Vicki Baum's novel. I found in the "Marina" a collection of interesting people, whom business, passion, adventure or Fate had swept down to the Gulf of Aden.

There were six gentlemen and one lady sharing with me the comforts of this caravanserai. There was an Englishwoman with her husband, formerly of the Abyssinian Civil Service, and now—well, I still had not learned what he did at present. There were also two oil prospectors employed by an American company, some subsidiary of Standard Oil. In an adjoining room Mr. B., a dealer in scrap iron, had his headquarters. At the opposite end of the corridor lived Herr G., his bitter enemy—another junk dealer. (The first complained: "There are too many dealers for too little junk.") And room number 1, the best and most comfortable of all the rooms, was occupied by a certain Baron L., the customary mystery man.

The Baron was the first of my neighbours to arouse my interest. In Pereira's huge book he was registered as "scientist", and the señor tried to convince me that he really was one. "Oh," Pereira said, "the Baron is a fine man!" But somehow his words sounded hollow. I noticed he was struggling with his thoughts, and then with his tongue. Pereira wanted to tell me something, but he feared that it was too soon for a confidential statement. Finally he could not control himself, and said: "You know Austria, don't you?" I answered in the affirmative, and the señor said: "You see, this Baron says that he is an Austrian nobleman."

"There must be some mistake," I said. "There are countless Barons in Austria, but I know of no family of that name."

Pereira erupted like a volcano. "Here we have it!" he roared. "He is no Baron! He is a scoundrel!"

"A scoundrel, Pereira?" I asked. "But only five minutes ago you said that he is a fine man."

"Yes, yes," he said despairingly, "that's the trouble; he's a fine man and a scoundrel at the same time." It turned out that the Baron had been living in Señor Pereira's hotel for seven weeks—without paying his bill. This was indeed heroic and made me almost believe that he was a real Austrian Baron. I tried to interrupt the fertile flow of Pereira's words. "Why don't you throw him out, instead of letting him stay and increase his debts?" He replied in a weepy voice: "Now it's too late; now I have to wait until he gets some money from Paris. And anyway, where would he go? There is only one more hotel in town and that also belongs to me." Now he felt the strain of being Aden's hotel trust.

Pereira told me the whole story. "When the Baron arrived, seven weeks ago, he invited me to his room for dinner and confided to me the secret which brought him to Aden. He said that in an old manuscript in Vienna he found a mysterious passage which spoke of hidden treasures in the interior. He asked me if I would participate in his venture by letting him stay in the hotel against a share of ten per cent. ~~in his discovery.~~ I agreed. Now here I am. Seven weeks have elapsed; no treasures, no money, no share—and now he is not even a Baron."

After this introduction I anxiously awaited the appearance of the Baron at my first dinner in the communal dining-room. He was a good-looking fellow (there could be no doubt about that). He was the only one of us all who was properly dressed for dinner, in the English sense of the word. To his dinner table he brought down from his room some fancy stones, examining them through a magnifying glass between the soup and the fish.



A YEMENI JEW—REFUGEE FROM SANA'A



KITCHEN IN A YEMENI-JEWISH COMMUNITY HOUSE

Baron L. was the thoroughbred type of cosmopolitan, harmful only to naïve hotel proprietors. He made his money by forming companies on remote possibilities and by writing articles for newspapers. On this money he managed to travel, although it was never enough to live in the grand style.

Baron L. had melancholy black eyes which radiated honesty, and a pleasant soft voice in which he told us exciting stories connected with big-game hunting in Africa, jungle trips in South America, and breaking the bank in Monte Carlo. All had the flavour of a magazine story.

Our little community became friendly over the whisky which we drank with dogged regularity every day after sunset. And the Baron was the life of the party. For two nights I had the privilege of sitting with him at his table, the third night his chair remained empty. Baron L. had vanished.

I suspected Pereira behind the plot, and therefore asked him, after dinner: "Where is the Baron? What happened to him?"

Pereira blushed.

He protested: "Don't blame me! It's all his own fault. I had him arrested. He's in gaol!" This sudden turn of events brought no comfort for poor Pereira. He was furious about some of the Aden laws, which, he said, favoured only criminals.

"When you have a debtor arrested," he complained, "you have to pay his upkeep while he is in gaol. The Baron costs me five rupees a day, and I have to pay for keeping him there. Believe me, it would be cheaper for me to keep him here in the hotel. It's a scandal. The hotels of Aden are cheaper than its gaol!"

Pereira spent a restless night calculating and figuring. The next morning brought the sudden release of the Baron. A friend in Aden gave him some money,

and with the first boat he left us, bound for Karachi, after he signed an IOU for Señor Pereira. The Baron was a genuine charmer, and we all went down to the bay, including Pereira, to see him off.

We all missed the Baron, until quite unexpectedly, with sudden outburst of activity, the two junk merchants made us forget him. Scrap iron had become a precious metal since the world was once more preparing for war. Germany, Japan, and now even Great Britain were buying up every ounce of available junk, to turn the useless old stuff into brand new guns, battleships, aeroplanes and steel helmets. The big scrap-iron firms of the world sent agents to every corner of the universe to buy junk. Where previously treasure-hunters and gold-diggers sought precious metals, now agents hunted for—scrap iron.

The two junk merchants were not on speaking terms with each other. Mr. B. told me: "This is a precautionary measure. If we talk we might disclose some of our secrets. Sometimes a carelessly dropped remark has tragic consequences. We are not enemies, just competitors. But we fight against each other with all the known weapons of modern warfare."

Espionage figured prominently in this junk war at Aden. Both men employed an army of secret agents to trace hidden scrap-iron stocks in the vicinity. Most of the agents, according to Oriental custom, accepted money from both and thus delivered their discoveries in bits: a few tons to one and a few tons to the other.

I was a link between the two foes, and I knew all their secrets. The morning after the Baron left us, B. told me confidentially that he was leaving by a specially chartered boat very late that night,

after his rival went to bed, for the island of Kamarin where—he was informed—the rails of a dismantled railway line were for sale. When he chartered the boat he did not disclose his destination. He would give the route to his captain only when out at sea for at least six hours. Then he would watch the wireless operator to see that he did not flash this sensational news to Aden. Everything was well planned, and no competitor could defeat him.

Shortly after midnight I watched B. leave the sleeping hotel. He crawled like a thief down to the bay. Rowing alone, he soon reached the dim lights of his chartered boat, and immediately after he boarded her the ship got under way.

Next morning Herr G. came down to the breakfast table. He was excited. His spies had already reported the other's coup to him, but they could not tell him anything definite as yet. The hotel became as busy as a newspaper office before deadline, with Herr G.'s room as the centre of activity. Within half an hour he knew the destination of B.

Now a rush began. Herr G. immediately chartered the private 'plane of a wealthy Aden merchant, and while B., blissfully secure, sailed at ten knots, Herr G.'s 'plane flew over his boat at 120 miles an hour and arrived in Kamarin in three hours. Herr G. did a quick job. He spent a few hours on the Red Sea island, bought the junk, chartered a small fleet of dhows, shipped the junk, and left again by 'plane for Aden. At dinner he was sitting with us as usual.

Some twenty-four hours later B.'s boat let down her anchors in Kamarin. The poor chap went ashore—and had to be carried back to the boat when he was told that his competitor had already stripped the island of all its junk.

B. returned to us, furious and in despair. He had a special personal reason for wanting to succeed. His father-in-law was his boss, and this was the first time he was on his own. He wanted to prove that he was a passionate and inspired junk merchant. His bad luck made him a hermit. He never left his room, nor was anybody allowed to enter his scrap-iron sanctuary.

A few days later he came into my room to ask my advice. Another informer had just sold him another tip. A Greek boat laden with scrap-iron had run aground and was stranded high and dry on a sandbar, not very far from Aden. Such news was the dream of junk-hunters—scrap in scrap, the chance of a lifetime. But there were some minor difficulties. The Greek captain of the boat was under arrest, accused of having deliberately run on the sandbar to collect the insurance money—which had been considerably increased for this special trip. Similar “accidents” often happen around Aden, particularly to Greek ships. One of these sandbars off the coast at Bab-el-Mandeb had been so misused by these modern insurance pirates that when I saw it I thought it hardly looked like a sandbar at all. When the damage is slight, Lloyd’s usually make no fuss; but in this case it was—probably despite the efforts of the captain—complete, and Lloyd’s refused to pay.

The owners, to avoid complications, abandoned their claim as well as the wreck in the Gulf of Aden. Thus the ship and cargo automatically became the property of the nearest Arab chieftain, since the accident occurred within the three-mile limit. This chieftain was Sheikh Mosin bin Farrid, whose tribe was feared as warlike and savage.

B. hesitated, but I was thrilled by the chance of a real sea adventure, and persuaded him to let me

go with him to examine the stranded boat with its precious cargo. We went to Colonel Lake, to find out whether we could count on the protection of the British authorities. Colonel Lake had no objections to our trip but promised no protection.

"If you insist on risking your life," he smiled, "provide your own escort."

B., in great secrecy, started recruiting men for his bodyguard. In a couple of days he had an army of six Arabs whom he provided with arms and ammunition. We chartered a boat and set sail in the direction of Unkalla.

Toward dawn we sighted the stranded freighter. A landing-party was organized, and B. carefully inspected both the wreck and the cargo. He was enthusiastic. "Now I'll show the world who's got the best nose for junk! I hope that damned Sheikh isn't difficult."

Now began the most exciting part of our adventure, the actual landing at Yeshbum, in Sheikh Mosin's territory. We were rowing towards the shore in two lifeboats. In the first was the ship's captain with four men of the guard, in the second B. and myself with the other two, the most trustworthy of the bodyguards. We all carried guns, prepared for any emergency. On the shore inquisitive Arab children watched. We landed and, carefully covering our advance as well as a possible retreat, approached the hut where Sheikh Mosin lived. The Sheikh, accompanied by the elders of his community, came out of his hut to greet us. "Visitors are rare here!" To our great surprise this elderly Arab received us with true Oriental kindness and hospitality. I could not understand why this man was held in ill repute all over the Protectorate as being savage and brutal. Evidently none of his slanderers knew him personally. He was one of the very few sheikhs who never went to

Aden to collect the monthly subsidy ; he never grumbled over Government regulations ; he never caused any trouble to the political administration. Living quietly and in seclusion, he became feared and shunned. We were the first European visitors, apart, of course, from the political officers of the Residency, who had ever entered the lion's den.

Sheikh Mosin invited us into his hut, which looked like a ship's log-room. Its furnishings came from the stranded Greek boat. The Sheikh lived there amongst nautical charts, compasses, the lifebelts hanging on the wall as special decorations. In the hut I ate my first real Arab dinner. It made me sick, especially the unleavened bread and the dirty water which was supposed to be famous Mocha coffee. The peculiar hut with its nautical furnishings and the sickening feeling around my stomach gave me the impression that I was at sea.

B. felt the same way. Sick to the stomach, he started talking business with the Sheikh. He soon learned that he would have been much better advised if, instead of the private army, he had brought with him a single shrewd Arab lawyer or at least a petition writer.

Again poor B. returned empty-handed. After much palavering the Sheikh told him to consult his fiscal agent at Aden, who had complete charge of the Sheikh's business affairs. Mosin told us : "I am glad and highly honoured with your visit—but if you came because of the Greek boat, you could have made arrangements in Aden as well. My agent in Aden is the only one to deal with because I—praised be Allah, who is a just distributor of abilities—do not understand business matters."

B. had spent some 2,000 rupees on this expedition. After the kind reception he was cheerful, and convinced that the deal was in the bag. So we

hurried back to Aden to see the Sheikh's agent. The agent turned out to be none other than the informer who had sent him to Yeshbum, the Sheikh's territory. The whole venture was a cruel joke. This became clear when he learned that while he was recruiting his men, chartering the boat and sailing towards an uncertain fate—Herr G., sitting on the terrace of the "Marina" and drinking an ice-cooled orangeade, had bought the boat for the lump sum of 80,000 rupees.

This was too much for B. He packed his things and sailed back to Bombay. Herr G. was left alone on the battle front, and international junk market affairs no longer interested me, since the intriguing competition had ceased.

I had already been in the "Marina" two weeks, but there was still no news from Imam Yahya. I was restless and impatient and repeated my application, this time by wire.

It was an expensive business. The telegraph company charged one shilling and fourpence a word to Yemen—more than the cable rate to London. It was the Imam who was responsible for these exorbitant rates; telegraph revenue was part of his income, and he himself fixed the rates.

Above all, I had to address His Majesty by his full title and name. A cable address would not suffice. Thus the addressing him alone cost me one pound, five shillings and fourpence.

I waited two days longer and, when there was still no reply, I did something which nobody before had ever dared. I sent the Ruler of the Independent State of Yemen another telegram—*reply prepaid*. It cost a small fortune, but I expected much from it. The night before, in the house of an Arab friend, a guest from the Yemen had told me that His Majesty was "stingy in the highest degree". I decided that

this economical streak was delaying the reply to my application. But even my desperate and costly measure proved to be useless. His Majesty remained silent.

In my Grand Hotel Orient, in this little slice of European life in the Near East, there remained only the prospectors and the Englishman who had been the Emperor's handyman in Ethiopia, managing the import and export trade. He avoided me because he did not like what I had written about him in one of my books.

He was constantly on the go between Zeila, Jibuti and Aden ; he sat in Colonel Lake's ante-room ; he held secret conferences with people I knew were dealing in armaments. He was altogether too busy for a retired Abyssinian Civil Servant, and I suspected a scoop behind his activities. In fact, it was quite a story.

Shortly before the Abyssinian War ended a large shipment of war material arrived in Zeila, British Somaliland, for which the Emperor had paid in advance. Before delivery could be made the Italians captured the country and Haile Selassie had to flee. The stuff in the customs shed at Zeila legally belonged to the Emperor, but he had no use for it any more. He commissioned our friend to try and sell the whole cargo, and to negotiate with the British authorities, and when this effort failed he approached the Imam, always a buyer of war materials. I believe the Englishman, a very able man, lost his fortune in the Abyssinian turmoil, and now perhaps he was trying to recoup it by liquidating Haile Selassie's bankrupt estate.

There remained only the oil prospectors. By now I already had my underground channels, and through them I learned that they, too, were waiting for their permit to go to the Yemen. While I was still waiting

their visa arrived by special messenger of the Imam, who had no news for me. When I stormed the messenger, he just shrugged his shoulders. "You'll get your reply all right," he said, but added, "Inshallah—if Allah will!"

Allah did not seem to will.

CHAPTER III

THE GARDEN OF ADEN

EVER since a whimsical globetrotter—probably bored by the sombre gloom of the town's rocky frame—called Aden “the ante-room of hell”, pleasure-bent travellers have avoided it. What I saw from the airy, elevated terrace of the “Marina” made me feel with the whimsical globetrotter. I looked down on a very orderly square and a shopping centre that reminded me of the barren Main Street of any American southwestern town. An invisible haze of boredom lay over the square and over the bay to the south. I began to feel like a shipwrecked missionary stranded on a desert island.

Fortunately Ali Hassan Ibn Mohammed came to my rescue. Ever since my arrival he had been my shadow wherever I went; occasionally he would lift his tarboosh and greet me with a sheepish, “How d’you do, sir?” although we did not seem to know each other. It was obvious that he had designs on me, but did not find the time ripe for an appropriate approach. But when I was left alone, the only guest in the deserted “Marina”, he sent his card in (a peculiar one, with his name and his picture on it, printed in green ink) and asked for an interview. He wanted a job, anything I would offer. Touting is an exalted art in Arabia, and Ali was a master of it; he touched a soft spot in my heart when he argued, “I guess you feel lonely; all newcomers feel lonely,

but only because they have nobody to show them around, to take them down to the native quarters, to introduce them to interesting people, to keep them moving. If you hire me as your guide, sir, I guarantee you'll never have a dull moment in Aden!"

He named his price, and since it was an astonishingly reasonable one, we soon came to terms. So far he had called me "sir", but now that I was his master he addressed me as "sahib"—which is merely the Arabic equivalent of sir; this hard-boiled Oriental knew that foreigners are always flattered by a native address. He took up his job with perfect efficiency. "What have you seen?" he asked, and when I admitted that I had seen nothing, he exclaimed, "Well, then, let's go places!" To my amazement a car was awaiting us downstairs, ready for our first tour of inspection. His job with me must have seemed a sure thing to Ali. Ali's initial programme turned out to be a magnificent prelude for getting acquainted with the town. Driving fast on the excellent motor road, he took me through at least five thousand years of human history.

A charming native legend places the Garden of Eden not far from Aden, on Seychelles Island, and since at the time of the Genesis Aden was next door to Paradise, it was naturally part of the scene of the biblical drama. Ali insisted: "When Adam was driven from his Eden"—Arabs never mention Eve because she is a woman—"he came to Aden and lived here for a while, sharing the rocks with Al Hareth, which is the Angel's name for the Devil. Here two sons were born to him, Kabil and Habil—as the Moslems call Cain and Abel—and it was here where Kabil killed his brother." He stopped the car below a massive block of rocks towering towards the sky, and pointed to a cave high above the road. "Up there is the grave of Cain!" It was a dramatic

site—as if Nature had erected a gigantic monument to man's first bloody crime.

Aden has another sad memento of human vanity. On a narrow strip of land to the west of the town, called the Isthmus, Ali showed me the spot where man challenged divinity by building the Tower of Babel. Only a heap of rock and stone in the shade of the modern steel towers of the British military wireless station is left of the ambitious but futile plan. I felt myself catapulted back into those dark, prehistoric days, a silent witness of the first crime and the first conceit. Out of sullen insignificance Aden had emerged in sinister beauty.

On our way back from the Isthmus we drove up a rocky hill to another ancient monument only three thousand years old. Terraced one above the other were seven huge water reservoirs, built by Bilkis, the romantic Queen of Sheba. They are hewn out of solid rock and can hold about twenty million gallons of water. Time moves fast in Aden; only a decade ago the Tanks, as they are soberly called, were still in use, while today they are empty and merely a tourist attraction. Aden now has a modern water system which furnishes excellent drinking-water from artesian wells of an oasis twelve miles from the town. The people of Aden prefer their new invisible plumbing to this masterpiece of ancient engineering art, and as we looked down into the almost bottomless depths of the largest of the Tanks, Ali pondered: "Up to a few years ago we were forced to drink the water stored in the Tanks; it was an awful liquid and caused us to suffer from an ailment called the 'Aden tummy'. Still, we prayed to Allah for rain to fill the Tanks; and when our prayers were heeded and the rain came down the whole town came here in a pilgrimage of jubilation, and danced around the abundance of collected water. But now that good

fresh water flows from the taps in our houses we never come near the Tanks and never pray for rain. We are annoyed at even an occasional shower just like the Englishmen. You see, it only spoils their tennis courts!"

Most ancient of all the Aden relics, however, is the rocky frame of the town. It capriciously zigzags as if to betray the ill-humour in which God created the rocks. Many thousands of years ago all this was an industrious volcano in constant eruption, truly the hell of the earth. The eruptions continually changed the visage of the peninsula, tearing deep clefts in the earth, hurling huge rocks into the sea, creating islands and channels and floods. The town was built in the very centre of the volcano later and befittingly named the Crater. It is indeed a strange site, and I asked Ali how it was that the people were not afraid to live in the crater of a volcano. He answered with the detached fatalism of the Arabs: "We trust Allah that the volcano is extinguished and will never erupt again—inshallah!"

In this tremendous hole created by the spleen of nature lives the greater part of Aden's population, about 20,000 people. Concentrated in a few square miles there live, side by side, the world's most hard-boiled and shrewdest races: Arabs, Jews, Parsees and Bunias. Trading is the chief source of income, and in this art of trading the races present in the Crater attempt to excel each other. Although these people live under the constant high pressure of conflicting business interests and in the trance of bargaining, although they are preoccupied with making money, and making it as quickly as possible, the peace of Aden is never disturbed. It seems that cunning, too, has its accepted rules, like a game of bridge, and by sticking to their rules the traders of Aden keep order and friendship.

I saw a neat example of this Oriental mentality in a street inhabited exclusively by silversmiths. All the shops belong to Jews, since the Arabs are not capable of the skill required for this profession, and believe all silversmiths conspire with the Devil. In front of one of the shops I watched a young Arab bargain with a bearded Jew over a pretty silver necklace.

The Arab asked: "How much?"

"Eighty rupees," answered the Jew. Without batting an eyelash the Arab offered: "Fifteen rupees!" What was meant as a challenge was accepted by the Jew impassively: "Seventy rupees!" In a quiet, calm and emotionless manner the bargaining continued for an hour, when finally the Jew and the Arab met at twenty-seven rupees. Rummaging in his purse, the young Arab began accusing the Jew:

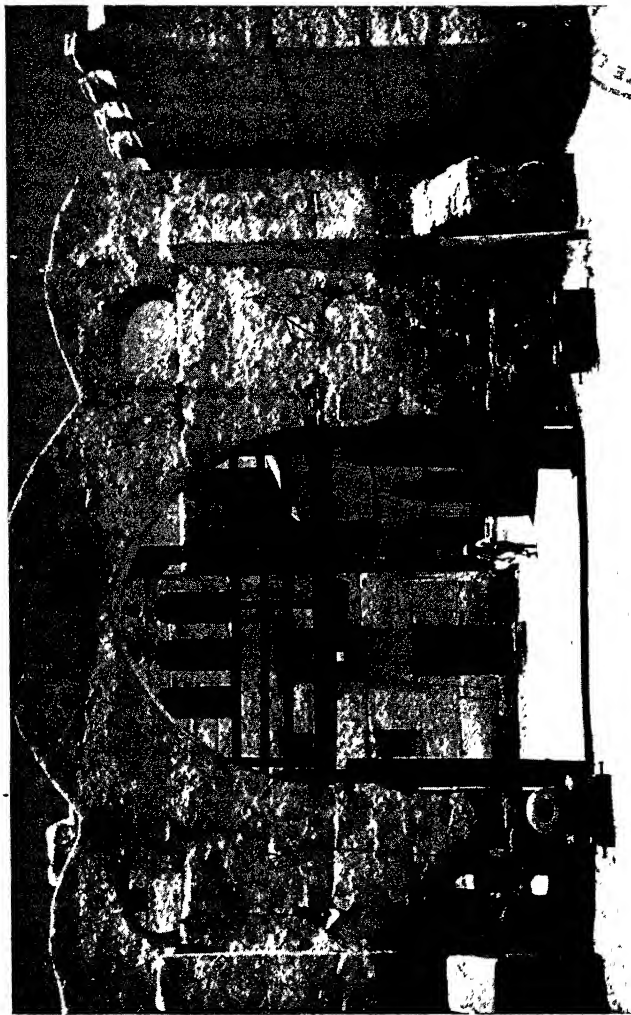
"Are you not ashamed of yourself thus swindling me out of my money? Wallah, you're a thief and God will punish you for your impudent usury!" And the Jew retorted: "You ruined me, even if you are an imbecile. May the loss you pressed from me take you to hell!" Although the words were offensive, the tone in which they were spoken was far from it. It was a kind of conversational tone like inquiring about the weather. When the buyer went on his way, and the artisan returned to his anvil, Ali explained: "They both only pretended anger, since they both know well that twenty-seven rupees is the fair price for the necklace. As a matter of fact, both the Jew and the Arab are convinced they made an excellent deal. When the young Arab shows the necklace to his father-in-law, he will exclaim: 'I got the Yehudi this time!' and the Jew ponders: 'I fooled that shrewd fellow; he did not want to pay more than twenty-four rupees.' What you have seen is mere play-acting, but it is part of these people's lives."

Occidental travellers in the Orient are always ready to stamp the Orientals deceivers and cheats whenever they feel bested by the merchants of the bazaars and souks. Bargaining is far from being a dishonest act; in fact it is the favourite sport of the Orient: fine sparring which demands skill no outsiders can ever match. Not even should he be cheated would an Oriental bear a grudge, but would blame only his own stupidity and lack of bargaining tactics. No Arab would ever think of condemning the Jew for asking eighty rupees for a necklace that he finally let go for twenty-seven rupees. It is the Jew's legitimate right to take a chance at attempting to get as much as he can out of his opponents, who are his equal in shrewdness and cunning. In this trifling incident I saw the explanation of the Jews' commercial success in their Western habitats. They are still Orientals and masters in the art of business in which the Westerners are clumsy amateurs.

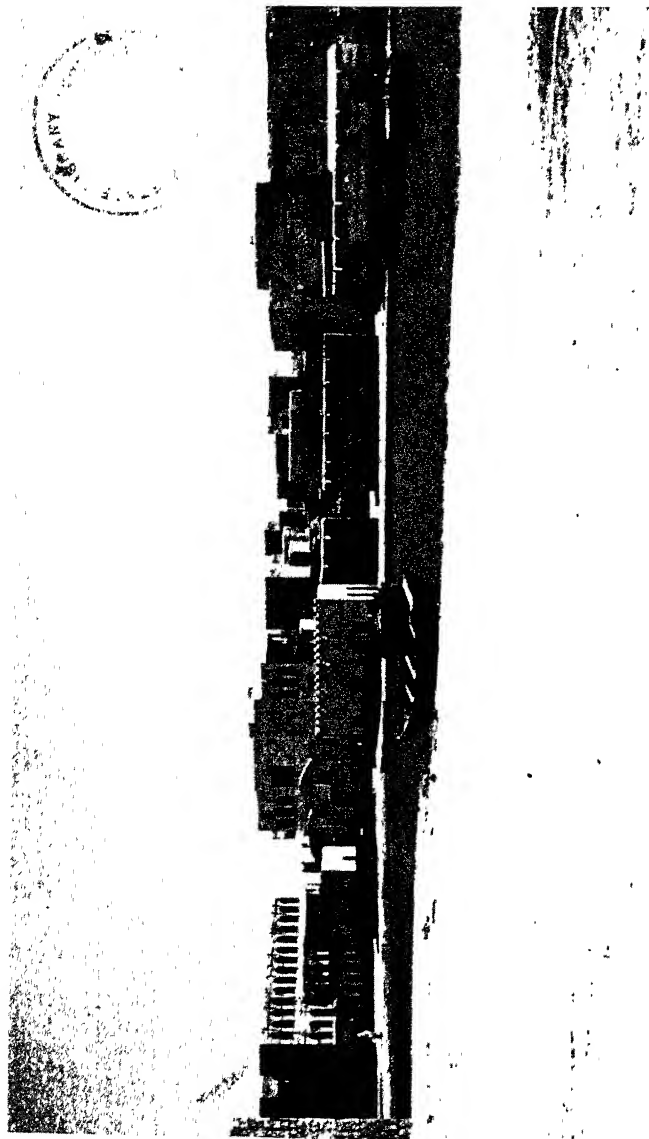
In this strange concert of business efficiency the Arabs play only second fiddle. The leading lights are the Bunias, a cast of Indian shopkeepers, who proudly declare they can outwit all the others, Jews, Parsees and Arabs. Next come the Parsees, who are better business men than the Jews. Yet cunning with all these people is strictly restricted to business. In their private lives they are pious, honest and kind. The very same Bunia shopkeeper who in the morning cheats an Arab as mere routine spends money in the afternoon buying all kinds of animals, goats, calves and birds—only to save their lives and to set them free. The Parsee is open to any charity and gives heaps of money to alleviate need and poverty. The Jews of Aden would, under no circumstances, keep their shops open on the Sabbath, even if it should mean losing the deal of their lives. And the Arab is not much of a business man, anyway.

Money-making and religion fill the lives of the men of Aden, who divide their time between business and worship. The Arabs appear to be the richest and the most religious, but only because their mad vanity makes them exhibit both their wealth and their religious fervour. Ali introduced me to an alleged immensely wealthy compatriot of his. He lived in an enormous house with his family and some fifty servants. His reception-room was furnished lavishly. I asked the man point-blank: "How much money have you got, Sayed?" and he answered, without hesitation: "Oh, several million rupees!" Yet Ali told me later that the man was very recently in such difficulties that he was compelled to borrow money. The fifty servants loafing in the house are no gauge of his wealth: they are housed and fed but given no salary, and food costs next to nothing in Arabia. It consists of durra and rice and salt; the feeding of a whole regiment would cost only a few pennies.

Aden's wealthiest man is a lonely young Jew. He never parades his wealth, although he is worth about five million pounds in safe securities and properties. On the contrary, he tried to minimize his fortune, since all the few thousand Jews of Aden would like to live off him. Bentob inherited his wealth from his grandfather, Manasseh, who was famous as a money-maker all over Arabia. When the English landed at Holkat Bay in 1839 Manasseh, whose family had lived in Aden for centuries, was a very poor man. They employed him as customs officer and he began doing business on a large scale. Soon he had made enough money to buy up all the desert land east of the Crater. What, at that time, seemed utterly mad, turned out to be a clever real estate speculation. The British began building on Manasseh's property, and by the end of the century a whole town had sprung up on the strip of land which he had bought. Old Manasseh



THE GATES OF SUAKIN, THE DESERTED ARAB CITY ON THE SUDAN COAST



SUAKIN SEEN FROM A DISTANCE

never sold—he only leased his land. When he died, at a very old age, a few years ago, his grandson inherited a fortune of several million pounds which is still increasing by the steady flow of rent and more rent.

The old man was a prisoner of his money: he lived in constant fear of being robbed and killed, and built himself a fortress-like house and had a huge bodyguard keeping constant watch over him. His grandson is a man of the world, with a college education and several European jaunts to his credit. Yet when he is in Aden he, too, hides in the house that was his grandfather's stronghold. The house is constantly besieged by seekers and beggars, and I had to fight my way through this army of dawdling wretches when I visited him. He himself was full of complaint:

"My tragedy is my wealth. Of the five thousand Jews in Aden only about one hundred can support themselves; the rest are dependent upon me. And believe me it is a heavy task to care for nearly five thousand destitutes." He does his charity wholesale: the Jews of Aden live almost without exception in houses owned by Bentob, and pay little or no rent. The poorest of the poor live in large community houses, often as many as five hundred persons in one huge hall. I was profoundly shocked and horror-stricken when he showed me through one of them: in the same hall babies were being born while the sick were slowly dying; and scores of innocent children were growing up into helpless and destitute pariahs. In this turmoil of dirt and poverty a corner kept spotlessly clean was partitioned off for the synagogue. The community had its own rabbi, who piously explained: "No matter how crowded the living-quarters of man are, His House must be clean and unsoiled."

Bentob maintains a number of other synagogues and almost all the Jewish schools. He estimated that his fellow Jews cost him about £100,000 yearly, but his generosity brings no thanks. It is considered the duty of those who have to help the have-nots, and according to true Oriental tradition, no one must starve when there are brethren with means.

The Parsees, on the other hand, are rich almost without exception, but these simple people never exhibit their wealth. It is their religion, the most mysterious and romantic of all faiths, that governs their lives. They worship fire; the eternal fire is kept burning in their temples, and in a consecrated place in their homes as well. Visiting my Parsee friends, I had to be careful not to extinguish the flame of my match when lighting a cigarette. I had to let the match burn slowly to its end, let the fire "die its own death".

Mysterious as their lives is their death too. The Parsee community's sacred burial-place is high above the city. It is called the Tower of Silence. To my many futile requests for permission to visit it both Parsees and Britishers invariably replied that I must never even venture into the vicinity of the quaint cemetery. No one but a few privileged Parsees has ever seen the interior of the Tower of Silence, and even officers of the Royal Air Force are ordered not to fly over the sacred spot.

But I was very anxious to see. I planted myself at the bottom of the hill leading to the Tower of Silence, and watched a funeral procession of white-clad Parsees moving with their dead up steps hewn in rock. When they reached the sanctuary, a whitewashed, low, circular tower, the body was tossed into the yard through a door in the wall and the mourners came plunging, stumbling down. The unwrapped body was left to its destiny. Soon vultures and wild dogs threw

themselves upon the still-warm body and picked and ravaged until it was reduced to scattered bones. At intervals these bones are collected and shipped to India, to their last resting-place.

Just beneath the Tower of Silence is the old Jewish cemetery. Turning from the sad ceremony on the hill I tried to enter it, but found the door tightly locked. The cemetery had not been used for almost a hundred years and I had to obtain special permission to visit it. The Jew who was its keeper as a side-line told me he had never been inside its walls, and tried to dissuade me too. He fumbled with the huge rusty key for a long time, and when the door finally gave way to an impetuous jerk the sight before our eyes petrified me with horror and fright, and made the keeper shrink from the threshold. Sitting on the old tombstones, giving a guest appearance, were the vultures from the nearby Parsee burial-place; the wild dogs were running to and fro in panic. It was noon, the sun shone bright and hot, yet I was shivering as if I were intruding on a nocturnal reunion of ghosts. I stood rooted to the ground, the dogs glaring at me with savage flames in their eyes. Of a sudden, as if obeying a silent, mysterious command, they pulled in their tails, dropped their barking heads, ran up the hill and jumped over the low wall of the cemetery. Screeching a strange tune the vultures too flew back to their dumb victims beyond the wall. Still holding my breath, I entered the cemetery alone. The keeper had run away.

The excitement of what I saw inside made me forget the horror. Sunken graves with their shattered tombstones, on which time had made the lettering almost illegible, huddled in long rows. My fingers groped over the inscription on one of the stones, and I deciphered the Hebrew wording: "Here is buried Lea, daughter of Hillel, who was the son of Abraham.

Died in 5143", the Jewish year corresponding to 1100 A.D. There were even more ancient stones : one eleven hundred years old, another some fifteen hundred. I was standing on soil hallowed by ancient Jews whose forefathers had come down to the Indian Ocean, emissaries and missionaries, sailors and traders of Solomon, and had died here long before the destruction of their Temple in Jerusalem.

I was overcome with the excitement of a genuine discovery, a discovery entirely on my own. Later I learned that neither Jews nor Gentiles ever paid any attention to these ancient graves. I am certain that excavations would produce most interesting material for an archaeologist, and hope that some day the buried mysteries of these ancient Jews will be solved by an enterprising scientist.

Returning from the dead to the living, I mingled with the natives in the streets of the bazaar, wandering through the narrow alleys full of seemingly busy passers-by, who in fact do nothing at all—customers crowding the open shops, camels laden with the spices of the Yemen and the Hadhramauth, children tumbling between strolling adults—together it was the usual hustle-bustle of an Oriental scene. Yet the native quarters of Aden have nothing of the dirt and smell of other Arabian cities ; both streets and crowds are tedious and orderly. It is the presence of the British that makes things so shipshape in Aden ! Although Aden, unlike Jeddah, has no examples of beautiful Arab architecture, no mysterious dark alleys like Baghdad, and fewer picturesque Oriental institutions than Hodeida and Sana in the Yemen, it has less contagious diseases, which fact in itself justifies the presence of the English.

I saw only two truly Oriental scenes in this modernized and mechanized Arabian Nights. But these two were sufficient to help me recapture an

Oriental atmosphere in this highly efficient environment.

In one of the less frequented side-streets I saw an Arab shoving a camel through a narrow hole cut into the wall of a wretched house. It seemed as if the Arab were attempting to defy the Bible and push his camel through a needle's eye. When he finally succeeded, I did with my body what the Arab had done with the camel, and entered the house. Darkness and biting smoke greeted me, and when my smarting eyes could see through the haze, Arabs and their camels were sitting around an open fire over which tea was boiling. I was in a real Arab café, the meeting-place of the slaves and servants of Yemeni merchants who come to Aden to do business with their Aden brethren. I was received with true Arab hospitality; a place was cleared for me near the fire, between a pitch-black Somali slave and a leisurely-chewing camel. I prayed they would not offer me a cup of their tea, which was singularly odoriferous because of the camel-dung used for firewood. The same sour smell permeated the whole place, and I was glad to get back to the street again.

Around the corner I ran into the other traditionally Arab scene—a row of strange barber shops. In fact, they were a kind of hospital, where sick Arabs came to seek healing. Each shop was owned by an Arab witch-doctor, a hakim, whose only prescription was drawing blood from his unfortunate victims, or patients, if you prefer the word. The shops were all crowded, with more patients queued up outside watching their bleeding fellows. They were sitting with their legs pulled under them on benches running along the wall, and they did not seem to be suffering at all. They were just calmly sitting there letting the cruel barber have his way with them. With a sharp knife the hakims cut deep into the flesh of their patients,

and when the blood came pouring out snapped the curved end of a horn over the open wound. This was supposed to suck out all the evil blood from the infected veins. Usually there were five wounds cut into the flesh of each patient; one in the neck, the others in the back over the spine. From time to time the "doctor" removed the horns and poured the dark blood on the earthen floor. With a dirty spoon he removed the last drops of clotted blood from the wound, and discharged his patient, supposedly healed and certainly relieved of a few rupees. Blood poisoning would often result from this treatment, since the instruments were never cleaned. Yet the natives prefer the barbers to the few European doctors in the town. One of these doctors told me that the only way to practise medicine in Aden is to forget medicine and just plug blood, whatever the disease. They, however, do it with sterilized instruments and cause fewer deaths.

Having seen these "polyclinics", I pitied the men of Aden and envied its animals. There is an S.P.C.A. with headquarters in the Crater where the veterinary surgeons take better care of sick camels, horses, goats and poultry than the hakims of their human cargo. Similarly, the only really clean and comfortable house in the Crater is the prison. It is so tidy and neat that the natives consider it a privilege to spend time within its pleasant red-brick walls. I doubt if this Oriental house of detention has a worthy counterpart in Britain. Being locked up is not considered severe punishment in Arabia, where transgressors are treated with savage and uncompromising justice. What makes their punishment really hard is that they have to work while in prison, and regular work is despised by all natives. Yet the kind administration of Aden demands little from its prisoners. I was told that although sometimes they have to break stone, and do

all kinds of cane work, the prisoners' chief occupation is the manufacture of tennis, hockey and football nets and the restringing of tennis rackets.

Which convinced me more than anything else that Aden is a British colony.

CHAPTER IV

VICES OF ARABIA

(I) *Qhat and Hashish*

I WAS no sooner acclimatized to life in Aden than I made the acquaintance of what Ali called "the Arabs' best friend and their constant companion". It was a reddish-green grass-like plant, grown in the hills of the Yemen around the city of Taiz. Qhat, as it is called, supplants almost all earthly joys in the life of these Oriental gentlemen. In the Aden Protectorate and other British colonies it is often described as the "whisky of Arabia".

Returning from my first tour of inspection in the Crater I found several nicely worded invitations: "I would consider it a great honour", one of them ran, "if you would be kind enough to come into my house tomorrow at the Time of the Qhat." This is like our four o'clock tea or cocktail hour. Between four and seven in the afternoon the streets of Arabian towns are empty and the numerous coffee-shops deserted. These three hours of the day are entirely devoted to the mysterious joys of the qhat.

I was glad to accept the invitations, and punctually at four o'clock the next afternoon I arrived at the home of one of my new friends, an immensely wealthy Arab merchant, to take part in the "qhat ceremony". To meet me, but undoubtedly more for an afternoon of free qhat, there came some thirty Arabs, relatives and

friends of my host. When I entered the room they were all sitting on the floor along the wall on priceless Oriental rugs and richly embroidered cushions. They were smoking water-pipes, which in the north of Arabia are called *nargilehs*, but here *hubble-bubble*, a plastic phrase coined from the actual noise the pipe makes when used. They are ancient Oriental devices, so constructed that the smoke passes through water and up a long flexible tube before reaching the lips of the smoker. Small groups each having its deputy host were gathered around the *nargilehs*. It was the deputy who took the first deep puff from the pipe, then handed it to the neighbour on his left, until it went the round and was returned to him for another deep puff. Servants tiptoed around, bringing water, tobacco and glowing pieces of coal to feed the *nargilehs*. There was no conversation, and the stillness was broken only by the hubble-bubble of the *nargilehs*.

But soon our host nodded to the head servant standing at attention on his left, and a general murmur promptly dispelled the silence of the room. More and more servants came, bringing bundles of the precious plant which they piled in the middle of the room, while others removed the *nargilehs*. The guests now formed a single large group around the heap of qhat. Our silent gathering became a lively one; in the dreamy eyes of my fellow guests I noticed the gay sparkle of joyous expectation. My neighbour turned to me, and pointing to the bunch of qhat said in a purring voice: "The green devil!"

Now our host rose and went to the qhat lying there like a natural, fresh shrub. He picked a bunch of the fattest and most beautiful leaves and handed it to me, his honoured guest. Only now, when I was actually given my portion, did I realize that I was afraid of the qhat. It is a dangerous, noxious plant, which the Arabs take in place of alcohol, cigarettes

and even women ; as a matter of fact, the qhat is an injurious drug, and I was reluctant to run the risk of becoming a qhat-addict. But it was impossible to offend the friendly hospitality of my host ; with closed eyes and sheepishly opened mouth I took the first leaf of qhat.

Soon these dignified Arabs turned into busy ruminants. They chewed the qhat until the green plant was crushed into a grey pulp. Then they spat the tasteless cud into a corner and, selecting another leaf with great care, went back to their chewing again. This went on for two solid hours until there was nothing left of the large heap in the middle of the room. The ceremony over, the guests left.

I found it difficult to share the enthusiasm of all Arabia. The plant tasted like any raw grass. If there was any taste at all it was sour. The longer I chewed the sourer it became, but apart from this nauseating after-taste I was unable to discover any reaction. No intoxication came to relieve my sour taste, although my Arab friends were unanimous in praising the heavenly joy which follows the chewing of qhat.

The qhat-chewing habit, centuries old throughout Arabia, was started not by man, but by a goat whose memory is hallowed by the descendants of the first qhat-chewers. An ancient Arab goatherd, pasturing his flock near Taiz in the lower Yemen, noticed that they would fall into a strange frolicsome mood whenever they grazed on the reddish-green leaves of a certain wild bush. They would hop and skip gaily, and would bleat cheerfully, and so he decided to try the plant on himself. With the courage of a pioneer he chewed some sixty leaves. His whole outlook changed ; he was in Seventh Heaven. His fellow-men were kind and generous, his body redeemed and his harem filled with beautiful young girls.

This enterprising and brave goatherd turned qhat

into not only a habit but a prosperous business as well. On the very spot where this ancient discovered the first "plant of Allah" it is now cultivated for profit. In fact the export of qhat from the Yemen exceeds that of Mocha coffee, this coveted plant ranking first in the list of exports. Daily, endless camel caravans leave the Lower Yemen heavily laden with bundles of qhat, and a motor road has been specially built from Taiz to Aden to expedite the transport of the weed in larger quantities.

In every Arab town, hamlet and village I found much more qhat in the markets than either fish, meat or vegetables. In front of the stalls of the native qhat-dealers the qhat addicts queue up early in the morning to get the first supply, and to get it fresh and quick. In Aden market the convoy of trucks with their fresh and generous supply of qhat arrives at about ten o'clock in the morning and by twelve the stalls are completely stripped of the costly plant.

Almost a ton of qhat, which had cost our host 150 rupees, more than £12, had been consumed at the afternoon's qhat ceremony. On the way home I was told by one of my fellow-guests that our host had been rather stingy. Feasts at which 1,000-rupees-worth of qhat is chewed are not rare. I myself have seen individuals purchase 40-rupees-worth for themselves alone. To get the desired intoxicating effect one must chew at least 2-rupees-worth, which is twice the amount the average addict among the common people earns working ten hours a day. For such poor enthusiasts a cheaper grade of qhat is sold, costing but a fraction of a rupee. I have seen sweepers joining the queue in the qhat market, clutching the few annas they have just begged in the streets. They spend it all and, with no money left for food or living quarters, they starve and sleep in the streets; but they will not renounce their daily qhat.

The enlightened younger Arabs watch the steady growth of this dangerous passion with increasing apprehension. During the qhat ceremony of the afternoon I noticed that a few of the younger men did not touch the weed. They sat there, silent and proud, stalwart protest against the customs of a sinking generation.

One of these young men said: "Qhat is the corruption of our people. We shall never achieve really great things, nor regain our sunken glory, if this senseless chewing goes on. You must not forget that this innocent-looking green plant is the world's most dangerous drug, more devastating in its after-effects than opium hashish. It causes the body to lose its resistance and become predisposed to disease. Qhat makes men and women barren and incapable of work; they become living corpses in their best years, unable to do anything but chew more and more qhat. Just as we fight alcohol and other vices we are combating qhat. Unfortunately, our struggle is completely futile, and the weed demands ever more victims."

"Why doesn't the Government prohibit it, or at least regulate its sale?" I argued.

My friend just shrugged his shoulders: "In independent Arab countries the men who are the Government are qhat addicts themselves. The Imam of the Yemen, the King of Saudi Arabia, and even our own enlightened and civilized Sultan of Lahej are enthusiastic chewers. Here, in Aden, the British do nothing about it, partly perhaps because it engenders complacency in the native population, but chiefly because there is a neat revenue from it. By the time it reaches the Aden market it has paid three or four tolls and duties. And even if the Government were to prohibit it, it would still be used. The passion is too deeply rooted. Our people say: 'Life without qhat is not worth living.' Therefore

what can the Government really do ? It tolerates qhat, and profits by it."

When I put the same question to the English I found indifference. "Why should we stop the chewing of qhat," they asked, "so long as the princes of Arabia encourage it ? It would only lead to conflict with the Yemen where qhat is the main source of income to the majority of the peasants and where the King profits through the tolls and licence fees."

As a matter of fact qhat's more dangerous competitors are also permitted in Aden. I cannot understand how it is possible that drugs which are prohibited and hunted everywhere in the world are sold openly in Aden shops. I could not believe my eyes when I saw a sign :

"C.D. Licensed to sell Opium and Hashish."

The "opium cellars" of Aden are neat, clean little shops, all run by Hindus ; their merchandise, too, comes from India. I spent a whole morning in one of these shops, but although I stayed four hours, only one customer came. He was a wretched pariah, a member of the lowest strata of the population, a sweeper who is not even permitted the same air as the higher caste. His face and what I could see of his body through the tattered rags he wore were in a complete state of emaciation ; his eyes were bloodshot ; he had neither flesh nor muscles ; he was all skin and bone. Hashish kept life in this imitation of a human being. He bought two-annas-worth. Together with the white drug he was given a kind of cigarette-holder, into which he placed the powder. Then he began to smoke. He swallowed the smoke, kept it in his lungs, then, forming a kind of pocket with his hands by folding them in front of his lips, he blew the smoke into this reservoir, and then breathing deeply drew it back into his lungs once more. Soon his features changed. On his lifeless, pock-marked, skinny face appeared a

demoniacal smile. His bloodshot eyes blazed mysteriously. I watched life return to this corpse ; with each puff his features became more human ; he was happy.

I asked him what he felt. At first he refused to answer, but then said : "If you buy me more hashish I'll tell you everything." I bought, and he became talkative : "I see you bigger, handsomer, kinder ; I carry the burden of my life easier ; I forget the worries of the day. Hashish is my only friend and my only consolation. Without hashish I would be a miserable worm ; with hashish I would not change with kings." This man, who otherwise could not have formed a coherent sentence, now found the words of a poet in his drunkenness. The Hindu owner of the shop watched the poor devil with disdain. He despised him mostly because he was a sweeper, but also because he smoked hashish. He told me he had never tried it, and loathed those who were its captives. Nevertheless, he was only too glad to sell it.

Hashish is not particularly expensive in Aden. One tala (some twenty-five grams) costs a little less than two shillings. Few Arabs prefer hashish to qhat, although originally it was Arabia's favourite narcotic. The word itself is an Arabic one meaning smoke. The customers of the Indian drug-stores have been almost exclusively sweepers, but recently babes under ten have discovered the forbidden joys of hashish. Instead of saving their pennies for lollipops, they buy hashish. They hide under the shade of trees in Aden's Queen Victoria Garden, smoking, until a policeman finds them and takes the hellish powder from them. There is no law excluding children from the hashish shops. There is only one restriction : not more than one tala to one customer at a time. It is only those young Arabs who combat qhat crusade against these infantile drug-addicts. They patrol the hidden corners of the parks, day and night, driving away the youthful hashish

smokers. In spite of this their number increases daily.

There are four licensed opium and hashish shops in Aden, one in Tawahi and one in the Crater. The Government collects 3,150 rupees in licence fees annually, while hundreds of thousands of rupees are collected in taxes on qhat. As a matter of fact, in the fight between hashish and qhat, qhat has been victorious—a sad victory which brings no glory to anyone.

CHAPTER V

VICES OF ARABIA (*continued*)

(2) *Red Lights Around the Red Sea*

I COULD not tell : was it the hellish heat—105 in the shade—or yesterday's qhat that had knocked me out ? But I simply could not get up from my bed ; I slept all morning and into the afternoon. It was past lunch-time when I was gently awakened by Ali standing at my bed, dressed only in a towel. When I opened my eyes he asked : "D'you mind, sahib, if I have a bath in *your* bathroom ?"

"Not a bit, Ali," I said, "go and have it !"

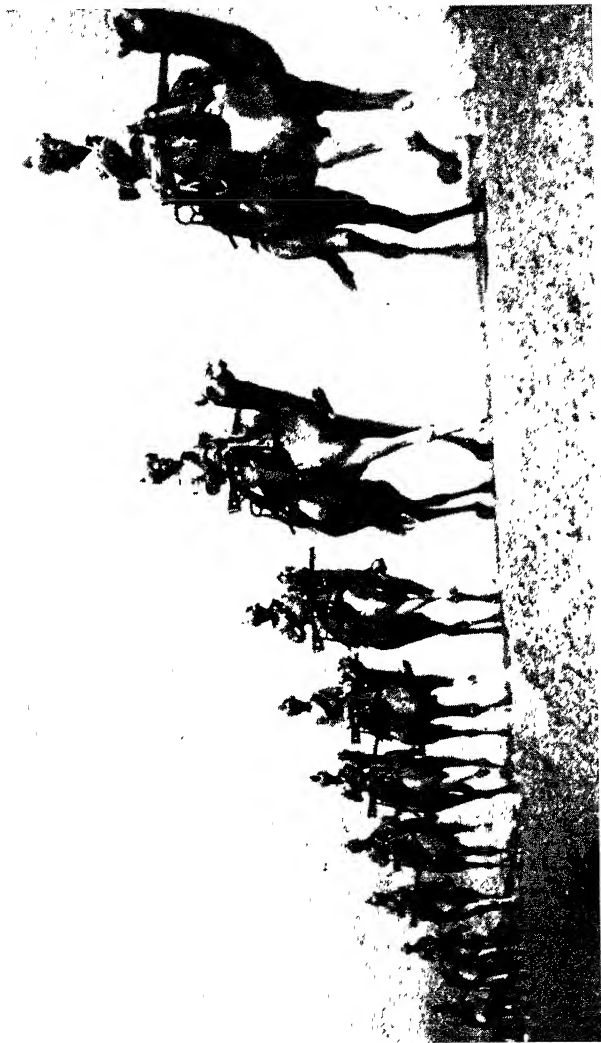
While Ali was having his tub I wondered about his most unusual request. Bathing had always been a strictly private affair with him, not merely a hygienic act, but a kind of holy ceremony, according to the Moslem ritual. Although he always spent all day with me, he would retire for the time of prayer, refuse my stronger drinks, and do his bathing in his own house and in solitary confinement. I waited until he finished the "ceremony" and then stopped him as he was leaving the bathroom.

"Isn't there a bathroom in your house ?" I asked. "I don't mind, only I wonder what made you use mine ?"

He blushed and started to stutter about some sudden shortage of his own water supply. But his embarrassment was too obvious ; I did not believe



WINDMILL AT ADFN



THE CAMEL CORPS OF ADEN

who are engaged in keeping order amongst the tribesmen of the protectorates

him. I asked him into my room, gave him a lemon squash and insisted on sincerity. He was still secretive, and tried to explain in a roundabout way : "It's frightfully hot these days, sahib, and I need more than one bath a day." Then suddenly he changed his mind : "You see, sahib, we Moslems usually have a bath after having been with a woman. I have been married two months and wallah, I'm a good and faithful husband, partly because I really love my wife and partly because stoning is the punishment for adulterers, but . . ."

He again hesitated.

"But . . . ?"

"You see, sahib," he said, "if I go home now and my wife catches me having an extra bath she will think I come from another woman. She always does, sahib, when I have a bath during the day." Now this was all too sudden. I had spent several weeks with Ali Hassan Ibn Mohammed ; he was my faithful secretary and interpreter. He liked to speak about his private affairs, his grudges and grievances, his likes and dislikes, but he had never mentioned anything about his wife. I did not even know he was married, although I had frequently been to his house. Arabs veil their wives, and their married life as well. I knew it would have offended him had I tried to lift that veil.

Now, however, he seemed to welcome my interest ; his heart was full to overflowing. "You see, sahib, you see, I'm a man of the world. I used to sail the Red Sea ; I called at Port Sudan, Suez and Port Said. I saw the girls in Egypt, and they are so very different. They don't wear veils, they are pretty, witty and gay ; they use lipstick and powder. One of my girls even collected pictures of Clark Gable. I liked to go to Port Said because I had a girl there, a waitress in a café ; I wanted to marry her. I told my mother about it. She was furious. She protested and cried and made plenty

of trouble. She realized that I was anxious to take a wife, so she looked around for me. Then my mother bought a woman—and I married her.”

“Why, I thought you a happy man, Ali.”

He protested, because Arabs hate to admit their troubles. “I *am*, sahib, of course I’m a happy man. But you see, the Egyptian girls are so much better. My wife is just like all the girls here. She has no interests, she can neither read nor write, she never went to school, she is superstitious and she likes to make trouble.”

“Let her make trouble,” I said. “After all, you Arab husbands are the masters of your houses.”

He smiled with a grim face. “You don’t know the Arabs’ houses, sahib. You only see that men and women live apart, that the men come and go freely while the women are veiled and seldom leave the house. In reality we men have nothing to laugh about at home. Until we get married our mother decides our likes and dislikes. And after the wedding there are two more women to command us : the wife and—may Allah protect you—the mother-in-law.”

Ali became pensive, and so did I. We are inclined to envy the Moslem husbands for their four wives, their sheikh-like passions, and for the imaginary orgies of the harems which await them after sunset. The Koran permits four wives and makes divorce easy. In fact, there is a complete chapter in the Koran, “The Chapter of Women”, regulating marital matters, which says that True Believers may “take in marriage of such other women as please you, two, or three, or four, and not more”. I tried to discover the social background of this passage. The commentators on the Koran, Arabs and Europeans, give various explanations, but I believe Mohammed tried to settle one of Arabia’s most acute problems : the contrasting sexual needs of men and women. I found the men sexually

vigorous, constantly demanding satisfaction, and they all complained that their wives were frigid.

The sex life of the Prophet himself is a confirmation of this theory. He wisely exempted himself from the laws of the Kōran, and took no less than fourteen wives in matrimony. In spite of his densely inhabited harem he was guilty of occasional escapades, favouring slave girls who served his wives. There are still many charming stories current in Arabia about the love-affairs of Mohammed.

"Today," Ali continued, "only one in a hundred Arabs has more than one wife. There is trouble enough with a single one, and anyway, married life is too expensive nowadays. As a rule there are but a few happy marriages in Arabia. Woman's influence dominates our lives, only you can't see it because we never speak of our wives, and hardly ever of our troubles. But believe me, sahib, we don't find much pleasure in our own wives. They are always grumbling, always in a spleeny mood. They demand new dresses, more perfumes, plenty of jewelry. The only thing they don't want is children. We men, we love children. Our wives hate the idea of having them. They do everything to avoid the consequences of married life. The dais always has some remedy that helps. Our wives are victims of these terrible witches; they are always suffering from the aftermath of some awkward operation, or at least they pretend to suffer. They are always having the zar."

"What is this zar?" I asked.

"In Egypt they call it hysteria," he said. "If you dare to refuse anything your wife may demand she simulates fits, she laughs and cries and shouts so loud and so persistently that the neighbours can hear it. There is a strange solidarity among the women of the harems. As soon as the wailing cries reach the adjoining harems strange women pour into your house.

They find your wife lying on the floor, and join in her crying and shouting. When this horrible scene reaches its climax your mother-in-law summons the dais. *She* employs cruel methods ; not to cure your wife, oh, there is nothing wrong with her, but to change your mind. By this time you are willing to do anything to stop the performance. So we are forced to go to the girls if we want half an hour of unspoiled happiness."

Every Arab town, even the smallest hamlet, has at least one street where "the girls" live. Arab girls are rare amongst them. These models for Mohammed's houris of the Seventh Heaven, who were so enchanting in the pages of the frivolous Arabian Nights, are poor lovers in life. Most of the girls of the red-light districts around the Red Sea are either slave girls or emancipated slaves brought by traders from Somaliland, the Sudan or Ethiopia.

I found that although the world knows much about the uninhabited deserts of Arabia, it knows little about its densely populated brothels. Sir Richard Burton tried to lift the curtain. He explored all the public-houses, all the inns and brothels, and became the friend of these light-hearted ladies and the trustee of their secrets. He wrote a book about them. Unfortunately, however, this adventurous Irishman was married to an Englishwoman, who unearthed the unpublished account of her husband's frivolous adventures in the brothels of Arabia only after his death. She was so shocked that she burned the manuscript.

For a special study of these brothels one must start in Cairo's Asbequistan (Fishmarket) district, where thousands of dusky courtesans live. While the Asbequistan is the largest of all the red-light districts in the world (putting even Rio and Havana to shame), it is the least romantic. The whole business is sophisticated

and highly mechanized. The girls live in dirty houses, in which red, green and blue neon lights advertise their charms. They have their business managers and publicity agents.

Further south, in British-governed Sudan, these houses are hidden from the authorities, but are well known to foreign visitors, who are touted to them on arrival. The most typical ones are to be found in Arabia and in the Yemen. In holy Mecca and Medina the pious pilgrims divide their time between the Kaaba and the brothels. In Aden there is a street in Tawahi for the benefit of the native crews of the dhows calling in the port. Dissatisfied Arab husbands prefer the neighbouring town of Sheikh Othman, where entire streets are inhabited by these girls, who do a prosperous business and live a sophisticated life there.

It was somewhat disappointing to find the courtesans of Arabia exactly like their sisters anywhere in the world. They love and laugh in proportion to the money spent on them. Yet the Arabs willingly pay what Ali called "fabulous sums" for their favours. These fabulous sums were: three shillings for a slave girl "who is ugly like the night that follows a heavy supper"; seven shillings and sixpence for a Somali lady recently imported; ten to fifteen shillings for the rare favour of an Arab girl, because if an Arab girl enters the profession she is the best of them all. There are so many discontented Arab husbands between Port Said and Karachi that the girls accumulate a fortune in a very short time. In Sheikh Othman I met a Somali girl, the star of the district. She conducted a big house, had three servants, more than £1,000 in her bank-account, and beautiful jewelry. She even had a kind of business manager, a fellow named Jacob, who took good care of her financial affairs. Her name was Halowa and she was fourteen years old.

The loveliest of the Oriental lovelies are the girls

just across the Sea, in Jibuti. This busy African port is the capital of French Somaliland, and its red-light district is discreetly called "Quartier Trois". It has its own Broadway, its little side-streets and a separate house for each little lady. The girls are very Parisian in manner, appearance, technique, and price. In 1935 I wrote about them: "In Quartier Trois the black apaches beat up their best girls in true Parisian style (ten francs); later the same girls dance wild erotic dances (twenty francs), and are at your service for anything else (thirty francs)."

Since then the Quartier Trois has had a steady boom, because it is flooded with Italians *en route* to Ethiopia, their new colony. Prices have rocketed sky-high, and the modest girls of three years ago today demand more than their sisters of the Boulevard Madeleine and Rue de la Paix. Formerly, Europeans came only to watch their dances, a curious mixture of savage tradition, primitive art and the up-to-the-minute swing. The Italians, however, are not interested in dances. They come straight for the obscure joys these inexperienced, savage girls try to offer. This Italian invasion spoiled much of the white man's prestige around the Red Sea, since previously neither the English nor the French went to the Quartier Trois as hungry males. Consequently the graceful little ladies have become fresh and cheeky. The new Italian Imperialism has certainly had its consequences, even in the red-light district of Jibuti.

It is a sad sidelight on Arabia's night-life that not only girls, but boys, too, are hunted by unsatisfied Arabian lovers. My Arab friends tried to explain: "We have a legend which says that the successor to Mohammed who will come to complete his revelations will be born by a man"! I discussed this kink in the Arabs' sex life with physicians practising in Aden and in Sheikh Othman, and they told me that the misuse

of boys by men is becoming as common as it was in the later years of the Roman Empire. A doctor of the Keith Hospital at Sheikh Othman told me the story of an Arab who brought his wife to him for admission to the hospital. She was suffering with some internal disease, and was taken to the women's ward for examination. A few minutes later an excited nurse brought her back to the doctor. When she undressed her it turned out that the wife of the man—was a man himself! The doctor reported the case to the authorities. It was disclosed that the man and his "wife" had been legally married by a Qadi and had lived together as a married couple for years. There are many similar cases on record.

I was also told that there are strange schools in Arabia which prepare boys for this brutish role. They are trained in an atmosphere of religious fervour. The climax of their education is reached in a trance, like the dances and self-mutilations of the fanatical dervishes.

Ali was one of those young Arabs who deplore the escapades of his generation. He never went to Sheikh Othman, and although he was suffering in his marital life, he was never unfaithful. I made a few clumsy attempts to console him, but he was pessimistic. And just to show me how bad things really were, he asked me to visit his harem. This was extraordinary, and he did it in desperation.

"You must not meet my wife," he cautioned me, "but you can come today. She isn't at home. She is visiting a friend who has the zar."

Before entering the house he looked about carefully to make sure that Madame was really not at home. We sneaked into the forbidden room that was Ali's harem. It took me a few minutes to get used to the semi-darkness. The windows were curtained and covered on the outside with wicker blinds. This

permitted a view to the outside, but no one could look in.

Ali's harem had nothing of the splendour of the Arabian Nights. It consisted of this single room, which to us would be our bedroom. It was nine by twelve feet small and there was hardly enough room for the cheap, unromantic European furniture : two huge beds, one tiny table, a box full of perfumes and a large wardrobe.

My nostrils were assailed by the heavy, unpleasant odour of stale perfume. But Ali liked this brutal scent. These strong and intoxicating perfumes are an essential part of the pleasures the harem offers. The women of Arabia make lavish use of their perfumes ; they spend hours in front of their mirrors, making a smelly cocktail of the various fluids, to prepare themselves, their bodies, their hair and their lips for their men. In the harems of the wealthy Arab middle-class this is woman's only occupation, and she does it less for love of her husband than to kill time.

The room was painstakingly clean ; so were the dresses in the wardrobe. Ali showed them to me with unconcealed pride. There were seventeen, each made of heavy silk, pink, blue, white and black. "There is a fortune in these dresses," Ali said ; "my money goes to the shopkeepers and the jewellers. This one"—it was a heavy Chinese silk dress richly embroidered with pure golden yarn—"is the one she wore on our wedding-night. It cost me three hundred and fifty reals."

Seventy pounds ! He had paid only fifty for his wife !

Though I had never expected to see the inside of a harem, now that I was within its four walls I was sorry I had come. For many years I had treasured a sentimental illusion of the glamour of the harem—now it had been destroyed. And I learned that the harems of Arab princes are not much better, though

they are much larger. His Highness the Sultan of Lahej, for instance, has two palaces of the same size : one for the men and the other for his women. The atmosphere, however, which shocked me in Ali's one-room harem is the same in the many rooms of his harem-palace.

The heavy perfumes made the air suffocating, and I was looking for an excuse to escape. Ali, too, began to show signs of embarrassment. He stood at the window, and threw frightened glimpses through the lattice. Suddenly he ran to me, caught me by the arm and pulled me away : "We must hurry," he urged, "I see my wife coming. She would get the zar if she found you here ! . . . May Allah protect us all from that woman's temper !"

CHAPTER VI

FUGITIVES OF ARABIA

ALI was a success. When he saw that I was desperate for news from the Yemen, he tried everything to cheer me up. He left the status of an interpreter far behind. Now he was my secretary. To fill the gaps in my daily routine he brought many Arabs, saints and sinners, to my room. Through him I made many friends in Aden, particularly among the natives.

Ali took me to many of the Arab clubs, and I began to live the life of an Arab intellectual. Aden has more than a dozen of these clubs, the most important being the Arab Literature, of which His Highness Sir Abdul Khadir, the Sultan of Lahej, was President. Politics were officially barred from these clubs, and my Arab friends insisted that they were only intended for social purposes. Yet in these clubs the Aden Arabs' awakening political mind was formed. Conversation always moved around subjects like Italy's growing influence in North Africa and the Red Sea, Britain's weak stand in this competition, and the sufferings of the Palestine Arabs. Dominating these clubs were the young Arabs who had attended the Near East's famed Arab universities in Cairo and in Beyrouth, and who came back to quiet Aden infected with modern political ideas.

The walls of these allegedly non-political clubs were covered with highly political slogans: "Arabia for the Arabs!" or "People of Arabia, Unite!" and "

with provocative pictures, clipped from Egyptian illustrated magazines, showing acts of terror practised by armed emissaries of some European Power upon tortured Arabs.

In the Arab Literature two such pictures were cherished : one showing a venerable Arab leader who had been executed in Italian Tripoli ; the other a row of Arabs hanging dead from trees, victims of Marshal Graziani's purge when the former Abyssinian viceroy was Governor of Libya. These pictures were mementos for the Arabs, contradicting Mussolini's statement that he is the "Protector of Islam". It seemed to me that the British authorities underestimated the importance of these political clubs. They maintained no contact with them.

At the Arab Literature a tea-party was arranged in honour of two Englishmen, officials of the Sudan Government, who had arrived in Aden the previous day. They were teachers at Khartoum's famed Gordon College, which many Arab youths attend. This college is very popular with the Arabs of Aden. They recognize its fine educational work, and appreciate Great Britain's sponsorship of it.

I had visited Gordon College at Khartoum and made a study of the British method of native education. It was fundamentally different from the method of the Italians, whose main objective was to take the Arabs away from their own intellectual world and re-form them into Italians and, above all, ardent Fascisti. The British, on the other hand, preserve the Arabic character of the educational system. The language they use in the College is the pupils' own Arabic ; they stress Arab history and literature ; English is merely one of the foreign tongues taught. It seems that the British method is the more sensible. The Arabs are too chauvinistic to accept foreign culture. No matter how much money Italy may spend on remaking these men

in her own image, she will succeed only in creating hypocrites : an Arab always remains an Arab.

I was invited to this tea-party. We sat around a long table in the great hall of the club, where servants from the Sultan's palace served good English tea and French pastries. Light Oriental cigarettes, Turkish delight, sweet sherbet and juicy fruit were offered. It was a dignified and exclusive affair. Aden Arabs are good pupils of their British masters as far as social ceremony is concerned. They copy the British example of social convention, but their efforts appear ludicrous to us Europeans, who expect a proper Arab feast instead of an imitation five o'clock tea.

An Arab merchant, whose son was a graduate of the Gordon College and now a teacher in Aden's High School, rose to address the guests. He spoke English ; one of the Englishmen replied in Arabic. When these formal speeches ended, somebody from the audience shouted : "Let's hear El Hathrani !" The gathering became loud and lively, more and more people joined the cry : "Yes, yes ! Let's hear El Hathrani !" Everybody turned to a man who sat in the centre at the long table, shyly sipping his tea, which he poured into the saucer. The demand became imperative, and the chairman invited El Hathrani to make a speech.

Still reluctant and protesting, El Hathrani rose. As he stood there, among his applauding compatriots, I admired this picturesque, forceful Arab. He was dressed in a heavy native costume, made of colourful brocade, richly embroidered with golden and silver yarn. Over his dress he wore a cape held together at his waist with a broad belt at which the sheath of a curved sword was fixed. The sheath was empty. El Hathrani's sword was deposited with the police, since no Arab is allowed to carry weapons in Aden proper. In the hinterland there is no restriction, but in Aden

no exception is made. As a sign of their office the Moslem priests wear swords in the mosque on Fridays, for Islam is the "faith of the sword" and the sword is its symbol. But even they may carry the sword only in the mosque and only during service, and Special Licence is required.

El Hathrani spoke. He spoke in Arabic, and although at that time my knowledge of the language was miserable, I felt I understood every word of his speech. He was broad-shouldered, tall and vigorous. His face was chocolate colour. His deep, black eyes glowed and dominated his entire personality.

He began in a calm, soft voice ; but then he rose to oratorical vigour, his voice trembling and roaring that even the glasses and teacups on the table in front of him literally shook in the fiery storm of histrionic passion.

El Hathrani praised the two Englishmen. But his hymn was a passionate plaint against those who shut themselves away from education and civilization. He did not say so, but everybody in the hall knew that he meant Imam Yahya and King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia, the two conservative Arab rulers who opposed the march of modernity.

The poet spoke for ten minutes, and at the end of his speech he fell back, exhausted, to his seat. His success was colossal. The Arabs applauded his speech—recited in blank verse—thunderously. This applause was doubly significant. It showed the popularity of the man and also that of his theme. Better education is a pet problem of emancipated Arabs.

I, too, was deeply impressed, and went up to congratulate him. He said modestly :

"Don't praise me ! Allah presented me with the words. They came like the streams from the mountains, and nobody but Allah could form and direct them." I asked El Hathrani for an interview, and he took me

and Ali to his house. He lived in the poorer quarters of Aden Camp. While he prepared the *nargileh*, some qhat to chew and coffee, Ali told me that El Hathrani was one of Arabia's most famous poets, popular all over his native land. He came from a family of poets, his father and grandfather were both bards, and El Hathrani carried on the family tradition.

A native of the Yemen, in Aden he was living in exile. When he was only fifteen years old he published his first poem. Raging against the backward and uncivilized Imam, it demanded more rights and less taxes. The poet was promptly cautioned by the Imam's henchmen: "Be careful, Hathrani! You cannot challenge the Imam!"

Hathrani's lamentations became ever more vigorous, until the King had him arrested. He spent years in Yemen prisons before he escaped to Aden. Now, at thirty-eight, he was the leader of Yemen political refugees, the prototype of Arab revolutionary.

"Kings rule," he told me after we smoked a round from the *nargileh*, "but poets make revolutions. In the past many poets brought changes over Arabia. The greatest of all Arabs, the Prophet, was himself a poet. My poems are smuggled into the Yemen, and sung by the oppressed people. One day, I hope it's not far off, I'll return to Yemen in triumph. It will not be mine, this triumph. It will be the victory of our common cause. The Yemen will shake off the yoke and her people will become free men in a free land."

I followed his words with enthusiastic interest. To me he was the Lord Byron of Arabia. But when I spoke of him to my other Arab friends, sober business men and intellectuals, they warned me:

"Be careful," they said. "Don't mix much with the poet. Undoubtedly he is a great poet, but he is a dangerous, unscrupulous character. He pretends to

be a Yemenite patriot, but at the same time he sells his own country to the British. He is a British agent. Sometimes he disappears for weeks, and refuses to disclose his whereabouts. We know that at such times he is at the frontier, especially when there is a clash. El Hathrani directs the operations of the British *soldateska*. He goes up with the English in military 'planes to detect the enemy because he has the eyes of an eagle. And then when he has sighted the Yemenite forces of the Imam he himself leads the British soldiers, for he knows the way in the desert and the mountains where he spent his childhood. He would stop at nothing to get rid of Imam Yahya, whom he hates. But at the same time he makes a living out of his hatred. He is well paid by the British!"

Aden is full of political exiles whose aims are more honest than El Hathrani's. Just as after the war Paris became the headquarters of the political refugees of Europe, Aden is the last refuge for the fugitives of Arabia.

The countries of Arabia are in perpetual ferment. Country against country, tribe against tribe, family against family. The whole continent is ruled by feud and intolerance. Thus the exiles of Arabia are numerous. Aden is their paradise. Natives in Aden have complete freedom as long as they respect the British and the law.

In the narrow streets of the Aden Bazaar I met representatives of almost every Arab country : refugees from Syria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Palestine and the Yemen. Among them I met kings and beggars, generals and privates, ministers and porters. Those who used to live in palaces here had to share their refuge with those who were their subjects in the past. The great Arab democracy knows no differences. Before Allah and in exile they are all equal.

Coming from El Hathrani's house, I visited Aden's most distinguished refugee, Emir Salem bin Achmed, pretender to the throne of Shecher. He was a member of the Q'aity family, the most powerful of all the Near Eastern Dynasties. The head of this influential family is the Nizam of Hyderabad, who is supposed to be the richest man on earth, and of whom the Arabs say: "His income is more than eight pounds every minute, night and day!"

In Shecher, a few hundred miles east of Aden, Emir Salem had been a wealthy man himself. He had owned huge estates and many palaces, had thousands of servants and slaves, his harem had been famous all over Arabia. In Aden he lived in poverty.

When I met him the Emir was an old, broken man. He wore what has practically become a uniform for the sultans of the Aden Protectorate: a brown frock-coat with striped trousers, and a high turban of green silk, showing him to be a descendant of the Prophet. Emir Salem bin Achmed is the uncle of the present ruling Sultan, and a brother of the late Sultan Omar. He was prepared to occupy the throne permanently on the death of his brother, but in Arabia no fixed succession to the throne exists. According to the rules of the Koran the throne belongs to him who proves to be the strongest—and Emir Salem ~~was~~ weak. Upon the death of Sultan Omar, Emir Salem was defeated. His nephew, Sultan Saleh bin Ghalib, drove him from the throne. For years he was imprisoned in Mukalla, because his nephew feared his influence. But the English did not forget the old man. They settled the feud, freed Emir Salem and brought him to Aden.

It was ironical that on the very day I met Emir Salem I also met the ruling Sultan, Saleh bin Ghalib. He was arriving home from Hyderabad, and was



SLAVES UNLOADING TIMBER OFF THE YEMEN COAST



A PEARL DIVER BRINGING UP A SHELL

welcomed in the port by the Political Secretary and the boom of eleven guns.

A small group of his subjects awaited him in the harbour, and I discovered Emir Salem standing in the group. His face betrayed no emotion when the Sultan's expensive limousine passed him. I heard him murmur: "*Inshallah!* Allah is great and his will is inscrutable!"

Similar unhappy events are frequent in the ruling houses of Arabia. King Ibn Saud has trouble with his third son, Emir Mohammed; two sons of Imam Yahya are in prison; and relations between Abdullah of Transjordan and his son Tallal are also strained. Only a short while ago there was a rebellion in the palace at Lahej. The present ruler, Sir Abdul Khadir al-Fahdli, named his eldest son heir to the throne of Lahej. This decision angered the other members of his family—he has three sons, one brother, eighteen cousins and thirty-four nephews. Ultimately the issue ended in a battle royal. The royal rebels attacked the Crown Prince. There was a shot, the Prince was seriously wounded, but before a second shot could be fired the bodyguard disarmed the assassin. The man who fired the shot, a cousin of the Prince, was killed instantly; his family was expelled to Seychelles Island in the Indian Ocean. The Prince was rushed to London for an operation, but he lost the sight of one eye.

Rounding up the fugitives of Arabia, I found a third refugee of royal blood, Sayed El Dubagh. I had met him before at the tea-party in the Arab Literature Club, where he attracted my attention by his strange costume. Most of the Arabs of Aden wore European clothes, but Sayed El Dubagh was dressed in the costume of the Hejaz Bedouin. I asked friends to arrange an appointment with him. We met in an Arab café of the Crater, where I found the Sayed busy writing one letter after another.

Sayed El Dubagh was a member of the Hashomite family which within the past twenty years had contributed no fewer than five Arab rulers to the Peninsula : King Hussein of Hejaz, and his successor King Ali, King Feisal of Iraq and his successor King Ghazi, and Abdullah, Emir of Transjordan. The last two are still in power.

Sayed El Dubagh could have stayed with any of his royal cousins, but he refused their invitations.

"In the courts of kings," he told me, "one becomes soft and insipid. I must not lose my strength. I need it for my struggle. The land of my fathers is ruled by an intruder who has stolen it with his ruthless hordes of Wahabis. Today the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina are in the hands of bandits. The war of liberation goes on. Ibn Saud, the Wahabi king, fears me. He sent his envoys to Aden to offer me freedom and security if I would return. I refused his offer. I shall wait here in Aden until the true descendants of the Prophet again rule the Hejaz."

Sayed El Dubagh is a son of the desert in costume only. His mind is that of an intellectual. He believes that the usurpers of Arabian thrones can rule the masses only so long as they are able to keep civilization from them. Therefore his aim is to carry modern knowledge into the Arabian Desert. With the remains of his once immense fortune he sponsors an Arab school in Aden, and writes countless letters to Saudi Arabia to enlighten his friends. In this way he conducts propaganda to overthrow the rule of the Wahabis and to prepare the return of the Hashomites.

The fugitives of Arabia have nothing to fear while they are in Aden. Here in the shabby little café the Hashomite insurgents spoke to me freely of "foreign oppression", of "ousting Europeans from Arabia"—this almost in the shade of the British Residency.

I accompanied Sayed El Dubagh to an Arab.

lecture, in which a refugee from Tunisia censured the French, and then, later in the evening, I went to a gathering where an Arab from Mogadisco, obviously an Italian hireling, spoke of the blessings of Fascism and called Mussolini the "Sword of Islam".

Various forces were at work in Aden, but I could find no British activity or British propaganda. Between the two fires of threatening Arab irredentism and Italian propaganda—Britain remained silent.

CHAPTER VII

ITALY BEATS THE DRUMS

THE next morning when Ali Mohammed Nassir came to work he brought with him a smartly dressed young Arab. "Sahib," he said to me, "meet Ismail bin Achmed, my very best friend!"

I greeted the newcomer with casual courtesy. "I'm very glad to meet you," which brought forth a violent protest from the stranger, who insisted, "No, no, sahib! *I* am pleased to meet *you*!"

Ismail bin Achmed's manners were perfect. He was a tall, powerful young man of about twenty-eight. He seemed to know that he was handsome, and I recognized from the studied elegance of his clothes that he was trying to exploit his good looks. He was the best-dressed Arab in town. Ismail's suits were made by the most expensive Greek tailor of the Crescent, his shirts were ordered from a fashionable Cairo shop, and he was especially proud of his neckties, which came direct from Times Square. The story behind the neckties was the first of his secrets Ismail made me share. It was romance. Ismail belonged to a correspondence club which had members all over the world. His "friend by mail" was a pretty American school-teacher from the Bronx, and no week passed without getting a pinky letter from his distant sweetheart. I saw some of these letters. They were clever in describing New York and American life, but asked stupid questions: "And tell me everything about.

your family. How is your father and mother? Or, dear me, have you perhaps more than one mother, because I have read somewhere that Arab husbands are permitted to marry sometimes more than fifty women?"

"The girl is stupid," I said.

"But, sahib, with each letter comes a gift. They are yours!" And he showed me a box of ties that fairly screamed with design. Naturally I refused the ties, but I understood his love for the American lady.

Ismail bin Achmed spoke in a pleasant low voice, and selected his words with great care. He attempted to translate the flowery idioms of his native Arabic into the sober English, and the result was an amusing muddle. Altogether, he talked too much. Within the first half-hour of his maiden visit I knew most of his secrets and all his views about Aden society. Ali was an embarrassed listener. When the flood of Ismail's words would not cease, he got up, looked at his wrist-watch and said: "You'll excuse us, sahib, I think we'd better go now!"

But Ismail was determined to stay. "All right, Ali," he said, "go if you are busy." Turning to me with a deep bow, he asked, "Do you mind, sir, if I stay for a short while?"

Hardly had Ali shut the door behind him when Ismail started to make suggestions which sounded strange from a "best friend".

"I wonder if you're satisfied with Ali, sir? No doubt he is a nice chap, in fact he is my best friend. but he is a bit uneducated. His manners are rather primitive, don't you think so, sir? I, on the other hand, attended the best schools of the Near East, I have excellent connections and friends in the highest offices. I'm your man, sir," and hitting the high note of Arabic: "The blood of my heart is yours, and my soul is burning to serve you."

He pulled a bunch of worn letters from his elegant

attaché-case and spread them all over the table. "Here are the certificates which my former employers gave me. They were fine European gentlemen, and they were all very satisfied with my services."

Out of sheer curiosity I glanced at his references, and they proved that Ismail bin Achmed was the soul of versatility. He had been employed in various capacities as secretary, guide, typist, prospector and interpreter, as liaison officer, teacher of Arabic, as tutor and as clerk. What aroused my suspicion was that all his employers, without exception, were Italians passing through Aden. Seven weeks was the longest time he had served one master. No wonder he had so many references.

I was still considering my answer, when Ismail began urging me: "I could start straight away. I'll settle with Ali, leave it to me, sir."

This was too much for Ali Mohammed, who was peeping through the keyhole, because he knew his "best friend". Burning with fury, he flung open the door of my room and shouted at the traitor: "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Ismail. This is the third time I have caught you intriguing against me." Still raging, he turned to me. "Be careful, sahib, this is a dangerous man. He is paid by your enemies to spy upon you. Throw him out, sahib, I beg you, throw him out."

I was a little confused, and said to Ismail, "I believe, Ismail, it's best for you to go now." Upon which this Arab dandy, not in the least disturbed, made a deep bow, placed his hand on his forehead and on his chest and left the room.

I was alone with a furious Ali. "I told you, sahib, that Ismail is my best friend. It was a lie, a terrible lie. In fact, he is my worst enemy. And your enemy, the enemy of every honest person. He is paid by foreigners to furnish them with useful information. You see,

you're still a stranger in Aden, and you don't know that this place is overrun by spies. They all work for the Italians. They pay them well. Ismail gets thirty rupees a day, remember, thirty rupees!" Ali's salary with me was sixty rupees for a whole month, and the average pay of the dockhands working in the harbour was less than fifteen rupees a month.

"It's incredible, Ali," I said. But Ali was anxious to dispel my doubts. He had got on to a subject about which he knew a great deal and he told me the complete story of these petty spies.

"There are two Italian consuls in Aden," he started. "The real consul knows nothing of this undercover work. But the other consul is the head of the secret organization. The Arabs call him the 'Fascist consul'."

I had always been interested in the activities of the Italian consulate, which had its headquarters in a nice little palace on the coast, leased from the Sultan of Lahej. On my first visit to the place I noticed nothing unusual. The consul was busy with the huge Italian trade passing through the port, and in the passport department the troubles of Italian Somalis, Ethiopians and Harraris were settled. Yet Italy had a second outpost in Aden, just opposite the Crescent Hotel, a building called Casa d'Italia, where the Fascist consul established his headquarters. Officially there was nothing unusual about this house. It was erected for Italy's own subjects living in Aden, to uphold the Fascist spirit when living abroad. From the offices of the Casa d'Italia the Fascist consul received the natives who were willing to do some service for him; here he invited the Arab notables for "free entertainment", which consisted of lectures and movies showing the might, force and splendour of Fascist Italy.

"Ismail took me there," Ali said, "when a few

months ago I was hard-pressed by some unpleasant debts. He was determined to tell me everything, and I listened, amazed, to a story which sounded highly incredible, but which was true.

"The Fascist consul was very kind to me," Ali said. "He gave me candy and drinks, and said, 'You're a clever boy, Ali; you ought to make more money. How about going to the Hadhramauth to sell some Italian goods? Tinned food, for instance? I know a very good Italian firm, and I could get the agency for you. Your trip and your expenses will be paid by them, don't worry. And when you return, see me again. I might have something better for you.' There was nothing suspicious about the offer. After all, he was a consul, and I believed he was representing Italy's trade. Therefore I accepted his offer. When I came back a few months later he asked me strange questions. He inquired: 'Are the natives contented? Is there any unrest in the interior? Have the British sent any punitive expeditions lately?' He demanded from me the names of important chiefs. Now I understood that he was using me as a spy. I was stricken with remorse and went straight to an officer of the Royal Air Force, who I knew was doing Intelligence work, and told him everything. Since then I have shunned the Casa d'Italia, and when I see the Fascist consul in the streets I try to avoid him. But nevertheless he had his revenge. Two months ago I went to Abyssinia on business. When I arrived in Jijigga the Italians promptly arrested me. They said, 'You're a British spy, and tomorrow we will shoot you!' They kept me in prison for about a week, but then suddenly they released me. I'm afraid of the Italians."

Ali promised me more revelations. "Come tonight to my house, and I'll introduce you to a number of Italian agents. We know them all, and you should meet them too."

Shortly after Ali left, Ismail returned as if nothing had happened. He was the type of Arab who, when thrown out the door, came right back through the window. I could not get rid of him. He sat in my room, and when I wanted to be left alone, or to receive another visitor, there was nothing left to do but to kick him out. Even this he accepted with unaffected politeness—and an hour later he returned, staying through until the next kick. Now he came as if he was taking his cue from Ali: "Permit me, sir," he said. "There is a movie performance tonight in the Italian house. I wonder if you are interested." I certainly was, and on the very same day on which I had learned so much about the activities of the Casa d'Italia I myself became a witness of one of their chief methods of influencing the natives.

On this occasion a moving picture was shown, taken in Abyssinia, presenting the miraculous changes which had occurred since Italy captured that land. Accompanying the film, the Fascist consul delivered a speech in Italian, which was translated into Arabic by the dragoman of the consulate. It became obvious that the whole affair was staged not so much for the few resident Italians who showed up but for the many Arabs who gladly came to the free entertainment by special invitation.

I went with Ismail and Imam Saleh, a priest of the Tawahi mosque, a nice little man with an open and honest mind. On him I tested the effect of the propaganda show, but Imam Saleh was not very much impressed. On the contrary, he was more amazed by the British tolerance of permitting this obvious publicity against Britain on British soil than moved by the effectiveness of Italy's propaganda.

"Can you imagine," he asked me after the show, "Britain being permitted to stage a propaganda show like that, let's say in Libya or in Italian Somaliland?"

Britain's recent tolerance towards the Italians was nothing new to the Imam. He told me how, during the war, when England fought the Turks, public feeling was running high against the British in favour of the Turks. "Our sympathies were with the Turks," the little Imam said, "since they were Moslems just as we are. Ali Said Pasha, the Turkish general, started a campaign against the English in Aden, and his troops came within twelve miles of the spot where we stand now. We greeted them as liberators. We refused to salute the Union Jack, and worshipped the red flag of the Sultan. The British administration did nothing to prevent this obvious treason. And today, I ask you, where are the Turks? They have disappeared from this part of the world, but the British are still with us. Italy one day will share the fate of the Turks—and Britain will remain!"

From the Italian show we went to the house of Ali, where a group of young Arabs awaited us. They were the "Italian spies" whom Ali promised me. They did not know I knew their secrets and we entered into a general conversation. Very soon they started their assigned speeches. An Arab cannot keep secrets. Whenever he is entrusted with one he suffers with the pain of withholding it, and the slightest encouragement suffices to get it out of him. Therefore Britain rarely uses Arab informers. Where there is a Greek or Armenian population, these poor European cousins are the British agents. In Aden, where there are but few Greeks who have no contact with the native population, the Jews act for the British.

The Italians, however, depend on Arab informers, and so the secrets of the Fascist consul are open secrets. The British hear about it even before the news is delivered to the Italians, although it is the Italian who pays. Here, too, at this amazing midnight,

parade of Italian agents, these men proudly exchanged their information.

Some of the young men in Ali's house were collectors of gossip which bubbled in the narrow streets of the bazaar of Aden. Others were entrusted with spreading rumours among the natives about British cruelty and oppression in Egypt, Palestine and Iraq. A third group had to furnish the Fascist consul with a complete list of the inhabitants of Aden. This list was promptly sent to Rome, where the Italians made good use of it. Shortly thereafter Arabs of Aden began receiving mail from—Rome. This was an extraordinary event for these people, who never in their lives had received a letter or a postcard from anywhere in the world. And now, like a flash from the blue cloudless sky, these letters came from faraway Rome. They contained leaflets and programmes of the radio station of Bari, in southern Italy. This station sends a daily broadcast in Arabic. The majority of these Arabs had no wireless sets, but this programme, printed in neat Arabic with the strange stamp on the envelope, impressed them very much. In greater intervals parcels arrived for them, and in Ali's house I discovered quite a library of books printed in Italy for the consumption of Arabs under British protection.

One of the latest parcels was still unopened, and I saw it was addressed with an addressograph used for repeated mailing, with six-lira-worth of postage on it—more than one shilling. With 7,000 names on only one of the lists made up for the Fascist consul in Aden one can easily figure how much Italy spends on this propaganda.

The young Arabs were rather indifferent towards the aims of Italy, and although there were about ten educated young men present only one of them had ever read any of the expensive Italian literature. This lone reader of the Italian propaganda was a clerk at

the power station, a man of sterling character. He asked me, somewhat puzzled :

"What shall I believe : these Italian books which praise everything that is Italian and curse everything that's British, or shall I believe the reports I hear of Italy's treatment of her own Arabs in Libya?" He turned to the Koran for an apt quotation : "How can we love those who flog us?"

The Arabic radio transmission was the more dangerous. These young men told me that the Fascist consul found a way to overcome the obstacle presented by the scarcity of radio sets in Aden. The Italian population of the town was ordered to turn on all radio sets whenever Bari's Arabic programme was on the air, to tune in as loudly as possible, and then to keep all windows open. This usually brought crowds of Arabs beneath the window of the roaring loud-speaker and, as a result, heated debates among the natives.

I was present at the house of a distinguished Arab when Bari sent out a piece of news which was good food for these discussions. They reported that several tribes in the immediate vicinity of Aden had been bombarded, and that the Royal Air Force used poison gas against these helpless pariahs.

In all Arabia news spreads—as Bertram Thomas puts it—"with the speed of the telegraph", and plenty of human interest additions to make it a good story. If there had been any bombing we would have known it by then. But Aden had heard nothing about it, because it had actually never taken place. We all agreed it was a product of Roman imagination, and yet some of these young men in Ali's house were uneasy. "Who knows?" they said. "The bushes of the desert never move if there is no wind blowing." When, a few weeks later, the London papers arrived, I read in *The Times* that this broadcast had excited

even the Foreign Office, and Anthony Eden, then Foreign Secretary, had informed the House that the British Ambassador in Rome had been instructed to launch a protest. The protest was accepted with a polite expression of regrets by Rome—but of this diplomatic *finis* of a ruthless piece of propaganda the Arabs learned nothing.

The Italians work on the 4,000 Jews who live in the ghetto of the Crater as well. In Aden proper this task is given to the clerk of the consulate, who is an Aden Jew himself. The Jews are unwilling to accept the Italian propaganda, because their minds, used to Talmudic meditation, immediately discover the contradictions in it. The Jews of Aden were told it was Signor Mussolini's intention to take over the Palestine mandate from Britain, and they were promised that under Italian rule there would be no curb on Jewish immigration.

At the same time the Fascist consul told Arab notables: "It is our aim to take over the mandate from Britain. And you may rest assured that the very day we establish ourselves in Jerusalem we will kick out the Jews!"

Such obvious blunders in the Italian propaganda take the wind out of its sails. The Arabs are definitely anti-Italian, in spite of the soft speeches, lavish promises, even despite the money Italy spends on them. An Arab merchant told me: "We have a saying: *al Daula yati la tastati*—a government should give and ask nothing in return. But the Italians demand our souls for their money."

A friend of mine, Norman Lewis, an Englishman, whose pictures illustrate these pages, was frequently a victim of anti-Italian feeling. With his Balbo beard he gave the appearance of a genuine Italian. In his presence our Arab friends were always careful of their remarks; they were frightened into silence by

the Balbo beard. We were once refused the door of an Arab house because the host was unwilling to entertain an "Italian". But sometimes Norman's little beard brought forth enthusiastic demonstrations by the few pro-Italian Arabs. In the street his beard was sometimes greeted with the Roman salute. One day we were sitting on the terrace of the "Marina" with an R.A.F. officer, when the head boy of the Italian shipping line approached us and, encouraged by Norman's beard, shouted, "*Italiano force, Inglis makaki*—the Italians are strong, the English are monkeys!" This was too much for Norman, and he rebuffed the servant. The man, realizing his mistake, promptly changed his mind. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said, "I did not wish to offend you. But you see, I'm employed by an Italian firm, and the wops like it if we flatter them. Those macaroni eaters!" He tried his best to make good his mistake, and it was no difficult task for him. The heart of the Arabs is a wide open space—with room for more than only one love, country or conviction.

CHAPTER VIII

KEDDAH SYSTEM AT WORK

THREE long, idle weeks passed—and still no news from His Majesty the Imam. The first thrill of Aden gradually vanished, the early sensations changed into boredom and indifference. The twin cities could offer me no more new attractions to calm my rapidly growing restlessness. Wandering through the broad Crescent, strolling along the narrow alleys of the native bazaars, driving out to Steamer Point, occasional visits in the Settlement Gardens at Sheikh Othman—all these pastimes that only a fortnight ago helped me to forget slowly fading time no longer held me.

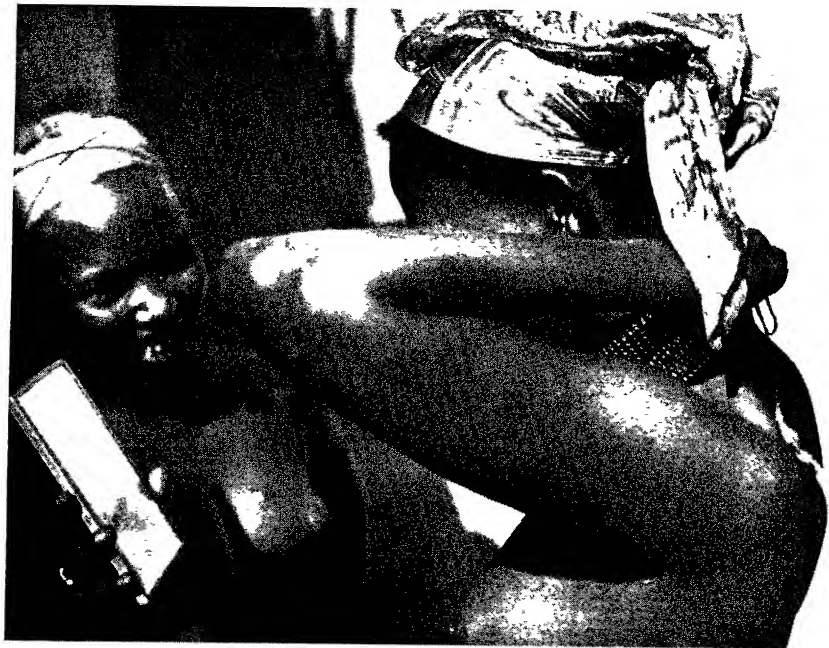
Just as the sights of sober Aden began to bore me, so it became obvious that the natives were bored by my presence. They made me realize that I lost all my "original virtue" in their eyes. So long as they regarded me as a sort of inquisitive tourist, who was only passing through Aden, they pestered me with their commercial attention. But now the Jewish merchants of the Crescent, the dusky bootblacks around the Residency, the secretive vendors selling "smuggled Camels" (cigarettes, of course), and even the usually clamouring Somali cab-drivers, let me pass by without paying the slightest attention. This state of affairs certainly had its advantages, but it also had certain sentimental disadvantages. When I was pestered by them I felt molested and was crude in shaking them off. But now that they let me pass by

without even noticing my presence I felt neglected and forgotten. I will never forget the look in the eyes of the Jewish haberdasher when I started to bargain determinedly over the purchase of some shirts. "Tourists never bargain," he said, reprimanding me—and subsequently he treated me as a resident, which meant no politeness but fair prices.

I caught myself longing for the return of the sunny days when I was merely a tourist to them. Being a tourist means many thrills. Being a resident is boring and lonesome in this town of sober routine.

How about going to the interior? To spend a day or two somewhere watching the primitive art of native fishermen or attending a picturesque Arab wedding? I realized, however, that there was no chance of slipping through the Aden boundaries. The hinterland was open only to the natives, who could move freely to and from Aden. To Europeans, even to Englishmen, all that lay beyond Aden was forbidden land. Colonel Lake had warned me: "You may move freely in Aden proper, and you may travel as far as Sheikh Othman. But if you want to go inland, come and see me. You'll need a pass."

Both roads built for motor traffic and mere tracks for camel caravans are watched by askaris (native policemen). On several occasions I tried to get by these sentries, but neither words nor hard cash could make them look away. The Government prefers to keep check on those who, for one reason or another, try to pass into the interior of British Arabia. Since Italy has intensified her high-pressure work, permits issued to European travellers have become very rare. It is no use attempting to run the blockade. A famed French archaeologist who tried to "invade" the Hadhramauth in his search for remnants of Arabia's past was refused permission; and when he left Aden, in spite of the refusal, he was brought



SOMALI GIRLS AT THE MORNING TOILET



A SOMALI GIRL IN JIBUTI

She wears the whole of her property in the form of a valuable gold necklace

back within forty-eight hours and deported. A very famous English explorer who, trusting to his fame and influence, ignored the strict regulations met the same fate.

Therefore when I prepared my trip to the miniature Kingdom of Lahej on invitation of the Sultan, His Highness Sir Abdul Kadhiri, I made sure to get a permit. I felt privileged when I found that there was no objection against my going. But even with the pass in my pocket, the trip offered difficulties.

There was the question of transport. Up to a few years ago Lahej was connected with Aden by a railway line some twenty-five miles long. Recently this railway was abandoned by the Government. They said it was a bad commercial proposition. Others insisted that it had strategic value disconcerting to the present rulers of Aden. Whatever the reason, the railway does not exist any more, and with its disappearance the only railway in a territory of more than 1,200,000 square miles (one third of Europe), vanished.

The primitive carriages of the Lahej Railway were replaced by rickety motor-coaches intended exclusively for the use of native passengers. The bulk of the traffic was carried by endless camel caravans—just as it had been throughout the centuries. Thus in the struggle between the modern rail and the ancient camel, the camel emerged victorious.

Learning of my trouble, the room-boy of the hotel came to my rescue. He recommended Mohammed, a Somali cab-driver, and his Graham-Page for the trip. "Somalis are treacherous, sahib," he said, "but you may trust Mohammed the Driver. Wallah! He is the only honest Somali in the world!" He knew. He himself was a Somali.

Mohammed was a chauffeur with ambitions. He cherished two hopes in his dusky heart: to drive

King Ibn Saud, and to drive a Rolls Royce. The walls of his house were covered with pictures showing his two idols : the Arab King and the English car.

It was Holy Friday when Mohammed and I set out for Lahej. On leaving Aden we had to pass two frontier posts, and although they were only some fifty yards apart they represented two entirely different worlds. At the first post the British sentry wore a neat khaki uniform, was clean and well-mannered. He quickly examined my pass and, seeing Colonel Lake's signature on the slip of paper, he lifted the closed barrier. The forbidden land was open to me. Mohammed stepped on the gas and the askari shouted, "*Bon voyage !*"—a gesture which was smilingly acknowledged by my dusky driver.

"Those are the only two *English* words he knows," he remarked, with jovial condescension in his voice.

Only a stone's-throw from the British sentry was the first outpost of His Highness the Sultan, in a dilapidated adobe structure which looked a strange mixture of crusaders' fortress and cow-shed. When we stopped at their barrier the guards were having their siesta. With his horn Mohammed hooted life into them, and like characters in a slow-motion picture they came up to the car and demanded to see my pass. When their commandant learned that I was no British official he put on a little show to bluff his country's importance. He asked for another permit issued by the Sultan.

I tried to explain that I was travelling to Lahej on His Highness's invitation, but that did not satisfy him. "You have only an Ingliz pass. Who are the Ingliz, anyhow? They are masters in Aden, but here they have nothing to say. We are the masters of this country! Allah be praised, our will is still dominant!"

His words were an empty boast. His Highness had no right to determine who might enter or be

excluded from his own country. Childish pride, nesting in every Arab's heart, kept him from admitting his country's submission.

After brief bargaining, in which I supported my arguments with a few annas, this frontier barrier too was lifted, and we passed out of the no-man's land which separates Aden from Lahej. Driving out into the desert, the fairly good motor-road faded away from under the car, as if an invisible magician were pulling it out from under us. The customs shed, which the natives call *Dar'ul Amir*—the Abode of the Prince—became smaller and smaller as we left it behind, until finally it was swallowed up by the endless desert that surrounded us.

The sandy waste which lay as a huge, desolate hyphen between Aden and Lahej is a branch of the Rub al-Qhali, the Desert of the Flame, which Philby called the Empty Quarter. To the north and the east a mountain range separates this spur from the mother-desert, but even this offspring gives one a taste of the desolate magnificence of Arabia Deserta.

There was a gentle wind blowing as we drove out into this sandy wilderness. It lifted the fine velvety particles of glittering sand and filled the air with myriads of these molecules of the desert. They were sparkled like tiny stars as the rays of the powerful sun broke on them. Suddenly from the east came a rival breeze, and where the two winds met the playful dance of the sands ceased abruptly and they fell like meteors down to the earth. The winds played with the sand like children on a beach—they built undulating sand-dunes, queer formations that looked like castles projected against a blue horizon.

The saddening monotony of the waste was uninterrupted by the few crippled trees and dust-covered bushes that dwelled in the desert. There was nothing to guide us ; no posts, no ditch, no road, no villages,

no detached houses. It was amazing to watch the steadily driving Mohammed, the car sniffing its way like an oversized trackhound. I felt like navigating without a compass.

Slowly I lost my time-sense—I did not know if they were minutes or hours that had passed by, whether we were driving fast or slow. The blue of the sky and the yellow of the sand allowed no comparison of time and space—and there was nothing but sky and sand. Now and then we met a caravan heading towards Aden. They carried the products of the land beyond the mountains: vegetables, the qhat, skins and sacks of coffee. Whenever one passed by the ghastly tranquillity of the desert was upset. Children appeared from between the green plants and grey coffee-sacks, stormed the path of my car and shouted, “Baksheesh! Baksheesh!” Their tinkling cries followed us until we met the next caravan, with more begging children.

The gloom and desolate emptiness of the desert haunted me even in my modern and comfortable car—when of a sudden something caught my eye, and I knew that even in this bare and inhuman waste there are thoughtful hands. Every few miles, under a leafless tree, there stood two earthenware jugs filled with stale water. These pots are to be found wherever caravans cross the desert, a big pot for men, a small one for stray birds. Nobody knows who made this desert law. Nobody knows who refills the jugs. But the wanderer with throat parched by the scorching air of the desert always finds a cooling draught.

At one of these artificial “wells” I noticed a small group of men quenching their thirst. When they noticed our car they started to hop, shout and wave their arms, and danced in the road to make us stop. We stopped.

The leader of the gang, a good-looking young Arab with long braided hair and engaging features, came up to the car and, touching the sand with his forehead, greeted me: "Salaam, noble lord, and be Allah praised who sent you in our path to direct and guide us to a better life!" The men were Yemenites from a village near Shahara, deep in the interior of the Yemen, beyond Sana—and I was the first white man they had ever seen. They had been wandering for months through the mountains and deserts, driven by their curiosity to see the world. Now I was the emissary of that other world.

Their spokesman explained their journey. "We learned from men who sail the sea that across the water Italian masters are in need of policemen to curb the unruly inhabitants of Abyssinia. We were policemen at Shahara, and now we are going to become Italian policemen. But we fear that if we arrive in our coats so torn by the hardship of our long and daring wandering they will refuse our services because of our poor appearance. But if you, O noble lord, could recommend us into the benevolence of the Italians, we feel sure that they will accept our services."

Mohammed, the worldly son of the desert, was amused by the unspoiled simplicity of his backward brethren. He turned to me and said in English: "Do as they request, sir. You won't get rid of them if you don't." So willynilly I had to dictate a letter of introduction for this gang of Yemenite adventurers to "the noble Italian nation" and recommend my new friends into the mercy and benevolent attention of His Excellency the Viceroy of Abyssinia. I wonder if my letter paved their way? It might have. Policemen are badly needed in Abyssinia.

Shortly after we left behind the Yemenite career men, the landscape changed its appearance. In the

distance we saw what we believed to be only the playful cheating of an ambitious *fata Morgana*: the succulent green of young trees, rich orchards and vegetable gardens, the sudden image of fertility framed by the dead-yellow sand. It was no fraudulent play of nature; it was the farm of His Highness the Sultan, who had created here in the heart of the desert exuberant gardens where grew flowers, vegetables and festoons. This hobby was made possible by the nearness of the Wadi Duben, a stream which carries water the greater part of the year. The waters of the stream had been diverted in Biblical fashion and led to the place where His Highness had extended the primitive gardens planted by his forefathers. Even with this primitive irrigation system the mango and papaya imported from India, the orange and banana brought from Abyssinia, and apples and pears transplanted from European soil flourished. Pitch-black slaves were driving lazy bullocks pulling primitive ploughs or treading the mill with senseless Oriental indifference.

In the shade of the trees we saw the roofs of the palaces of Al-Houtah, the pride of Lahej, its capital.

We left Aden at eight o'clock in the morning and arrived at Al-Houtah shortly after 10 a.m. As our car nosed its way through the throngs which milled in narrow streets it seemed as if nobody had been left to watch the fires in the houses. It was Friday, and countryfolk from the villages of Lahej had come to visit friends and relatives, to make purchases in the *suk* (market), or to enjoy the worldly pleasures of this desert metropolis. For most of these country people Al-Houtah was the height of civilization, and although Aden with all its marvels was within the range of their wandering feet, the majority of them had never tried to penetrate it. They called it the "ante-room of

hell" until they got there; afterwards they always remembered it as "the Seventh Heaven".

In Al-Houtah live 12,000 people, Lahej Arabs and Hujour, men of an imposing physique, most of them giants, and unusually energetic. Most of the inhabitants of Arabia are of a mixed race—the fathers only too often married their African slaves, and thus negroid characteristics, flat nose, full lips and great ears, supersede the natural beauty of the real Arabs' features. The inhabitants of Lahej, however, fully preserved the original characteristics of their proud race. They are mostly black, yet their faces, their poise, their statures have not changed through the centuries—the few true Arabs of a race sinking fast.

Their dark skin had a glaring bluish sheen which was a reflector for the rays of the sun. In the suburbs of Al-Houtah and also at Sheikh Othman I saw the one and only industry of the natives: the indigo plants, where Arabs formed queues waiting to get their bodies and turbans dyed. They took a few yards of sheeting, dipped them in the indigo, wrapped the cloth around them, and, dressed in this blue blanket, went home. They spent the night wrapped in this indigo-soaked sheet, to awaken the next morning with their bodies darkened to the colour of the indigo.

These indigo-Arabs were busy enjoying the short pleasures of the holy day. They gathered in groups around dancing girls, who whirled in the sand, singing strange, monotonous songs in guttural voices, accompanied by the native instruments—fiddles with only one string and huge eye-shaped tomtoms. Others stood around the miniature rifle-ranges, which seemed to attract the most customers. All the open-air cafés and restaurants of Lahej were overcrowded. Lamb was roasted on an open fire, and the smell of

burning meat fouled the air. The whole town resembled a gay fair—and this happened every Friday.

We arrived on the great square where the old palace of His Highness stands. Our car was stopped by the huge crowd that had gathered, and it was with great difficulty that we forced our way to the front line to see what was taking place. In front of the palace was assembled the garrison of Al-Houtah, the 300-odd soldiers His Highness is permitted to maintain. A tiny army but an efficient one. Trained by a British officer named Robertson, who was one of Al-Houtah's two Europeans, they were impressive in their formation, waiting on the Sultan to accompany him as a feudal escort to prayers in the mosque. At the head of the line was the military band of about fifteen musicians. Both soldiers and musicians wore neat uniforms, but were barefoot. Every modern instrument was represented in the band, from bugle to trombone, from pistone to saxophone.

Hardly had we found a vantage point when a wave of excitement went through the air. In the open doorway of the palace appeared a giant, dressed in the Arab's "Sunday best", carrying an old rifle on his shoulder. He raised his hand and gave the sign. Harsh commands brought silence. The soldiers jumped to attention, the musicians lifted their instruments, and His Highness appeared in the doorway, followed by his brother, his son, and members of his personal bodyguard. The native officers roared just as the Coldstream Guards do when the King of England drives along the Mall: "Company! Preeee-sent aaaarms!" The band played the National Anthem of the Lahej. The tune, resembling a medley of military marches by Sousa, was composed by Lahej's other European, a Russian Jew, the Sultan's general handyman.

The band led the procession, followed by a

company of the soldiers. His Highness followed. With dignified, majestic step, slow-paced, he walked, while the crowd marvelled in silent devotion. Native musicians left the crowd to join the band. Their sole ambition was to make as much noise as possible with their guttural 'fiddles and huge tomtoms. In the caterwauling of these free-lances the organized tunes of the military band were drowned. Nobody seemed to care.

Behind the Sultan marched another company of the army. Waiting until the Sultan and his soldiers passed, the onlookers joined the procession, following their ruler into the mosque. In spite of its primitiveness, the scene did not lack Oriental splendour. Above all, it had a charming symbolic significance: the Ruling Father, who by birth and ability was high above the 30,000 subjects of his tiny country, became one of them each Friday, when, abandoning his magnificent motor-car, he walked with the humblest of his subjects into the presence of Allah. On this day the Sultan laid aside his semi-European clothes. He wore a jacket and the *foutah*, a coloured loin-cloth which came down to his knees and which made him look like a Scotch Highlander in kilts. He carried himself with innate dignity, his face had a kind and serious expression. His body was not dyed with indigo.

My audience was scheduled for after prayer. In the meantime I was received by Vizier Abdullah, a young Arab who handled the affairs of State. I addressed him as "Minister", but he protested against my using that high-sounding title:

"What an immensely great title for such a small state and tiny office! I am the slave of His Highness, the humble executor of his paramount will. No more and nothing less."

In Vizier Abdullah I met the most enlightened

Arab of my whole journey. We had a long and very interesting conversation. He was alert to everything happening in the world; he knew of the problems of Europe and was worried because he realized that the interests of his own country could be served only by a peaceful continent. He complained about the weak stand of Britain against the Fascist powers, and I tried to explain: "It is only because in England peace has become a religion to people and Government, and the British Government is willing to make any sacrifice to preserve peace." He made a despairing gesture and said:

"To preserve peace? Which peace? Where is that peace which the British Government is trying to preserve? Is there no war in Abyssinia, in Spain, in Palestine? Are not thousands of innocent people dying every day—more than were killed in the battles of the World War? Why try to preserve an imaginary peace when a swift war could create a better and more lasting one?" Vizier Abdullah had travelled much; he had spent months in Egypt, and his political outlook lacked the fanaticism of the Wahabis. In fact, he was frank and outspoken about the Arabs of Ibn Saud.

"There is an anecdote," he said, "about the Wahabis. When the hordes of Ibn Saud invaded the Hejaz they found a man who protested against persecution by insisting that he himself was a Wahabi. 'If you are a Wahabi,' the soldiers said to him, 'then prove it! Tell us how you spend your days.' And the man replied: 'At dawn I leave my harem for the first prayer; after prayer I go back to the harem to have some more sleep, until the sun is climbing the mountains and I have to perform the second prayer. After that I have my meal, and go to bed to sleep until it is time for the third prayer. I sleep until the sunset, and get up for the fourth

prayer, after which I again retire to my harem for the night, to leave only to turn towards the Holy Mecca for the fifth prayer.' The soldiers were convinced. 'Wallah,' they exclaimed, 'you are a true Wahabi!'

In this little story he revealed his political conviction. While the life of the successful Wahabi is divided between war, prayer, and the pleasures of the harem, Vizier Abdullah wishes to profit from the blessings of modern European civilization.

"The revenue of His Highness is small," Vizier Abdullah said, "some 275,000 rupees" (about £20,000) "a year. This small amount permits us no extravagances. Out of this sum the Sultan has to pay all the expenditure of his country, the upkeep of his army, his three palaces in Aden and Al-Houtah, and has to support his relatives. Yet we saved money for a few really European establishments, and if you have nothing better to do, let's go. I should like to show you some."

His baby Austin stood in front of his palatial house. He invited me into this tiny car, and we drove northward to the private gardens of His Highness. The little Austin fought a heroic battle against the impregnable roads. She was no youngster. Vizier Abdullah had bought it second-hand, and if I had any doubts about the much advertised versatility of this miniature English car, this trip dispelled them. Shaken like a medicine bottle, we arrived at the gardens, another green spot in the yellow landscape. Here the countryside was overwhelmingly beautiful. Bordering the gardens I could see the deep canyons of the Wadi Durbar, which was full of water since Lahej had had torrential rains only a few days before. Rain is not unusual in Lahej, although for the people of Aden it is a rare sensation.

To the people of Lahej rain is just as essential as it is to peasants anywhere in the world. They make

their living from agriculture and accordingly are dependent upon natural irrigation. They do not have much of it, but from time to time there is a shower which fills the canyons of the rivers. Then the water comes rushing down from the mountains of Yemen, the countryside is flooded; and the Wadi Durbar is filled to overflowing. The land swallows the water thirstily and the dry soil becomes fertile.

The private garden of His Highness resembles a botanical garden. Almost every plant of the world is represented there, and Vizier Abdullah told me that only recently the Sultan had ordered plants from California to enlarge the variety of his collection. Aside from the botanical wonders, a fine swimming pool and tennis courts are among the wonders of this little oasis. I did not expect to find such things in this uncivilized desert, but His Highness is anxious to introduce all the blessings of modern civilization to his little country, and being a British king, to him civilization begins with tennis courts. What amazed me was nothing extraordinary to the Englishmen of Aden. When, on my return, I raved about the pool and the tennis courts, my English friends refused to share my enthusiasm. "Well," they said, "what about it? The Sultan's tennis courts are the wrong size."

From the gardens he took me to another pride of His Highness. It was a dispensary. This, too, was maintained by the Sultan, and its budget of 10,000 rupees was a heavy burden to him. Nevertheless he tried to extend it, because he believed it had a mission in and around Aden.

When later in the afternoon I was received by His Highness I congratulated him on the fine little hospital, and the Sultan gladly acknowledged my congratulations.

"My country was plagued," he said, "with disease. Malaria, venereal diseases, pulmonary tuberculosis

and dysentery were most common. But we have actually succeeded in reducing the fatal cases, and have checked the spreading of these maladies altogether. Not only in Lahej but as far as Yemen this is the only modern dispensary. You can judge its real importance when you know that in a single year 1,565 Yemenites have visited the dispensary. Sometimes they walked weeks for medical treatment. But they come in ever-increasing numbers, and I am very glad that at least a section of my suffering countrymen find relief through my assistance."

Sir Abdul Kadhir, the Sultan of Lahej, is a modern man in every respect, the result of a successful British experiment. In former years the British administration had had many headaches over the unruly tribes of the interior, and punitive expeditions against the obstinate countryfolk were orders of the day. The Bombay Government tried to find a remedy, and an ingenious Indian administrator suggested the application of the Keddah system. In India this system is employed to tame wild elephants. The British firmly believed it could be applied to Arabs as well.

According to the Keddah system, elephant hunters catch only a single elephant. It takes a year's hard work to tame it. This tamed elephant is then sent back to the jungle and set free. It seems that the "civilized elephant" is a good influence in the jungle, for the enlightened brother is successful in taming his brethren.

In 1905 the Sultan of Lahej was selected as the Keddah, and the strange experiment brought results beyond expectation. Today civilization, which was injected into his predecessor artificially, is already a sacred tradition to Sir Abdul Kadhir. He is a cultured ruler by firm conviction, and he is at the disposal of the British authorities whenever trouble crops up in the hinterland. He is respected and honoured, not

only by the British (who made him a Knight Commander of the coveted order Star of India), but also by his own countrymen, which is far more important. Whenever there is a round table conference of native rulers in Aden, His Highness is the leader of the gathering. The Keddah system worked.

So great is his admiration for modern achievements, which he sees represented in the British, that nothing can drown his enthusiasm. He had cause to nurture a grievance. His predecessor, his brother, was killed in action defending the British against the Turks during the World War. It was the sad ending of a strange accident. Said Pasha's troops defeated the Sultan's army. The Sultan had to leave Al-Houtah in a hurry, and retreated towards Sheikh Othman, which was garrisoned with Hindu soldiers of Britain. So unexpected was his retreat he had no time to give notice. With his mounted troops he was riding fast through the desert, and when he arrived in the outskirts of Sheikh Othman under cover of night the British believed him to be the outpost of an attacking Turkish force and opened fire. When things became clear it was too late. Many good Lahej warriors were killed in this unfortunate battle, and among the fatally wounded was the Sultan himself.

Abdul Kadhiri deeply mourned the death of his brother but did not bear the British a grudge. "Allah gave him, Allah has taken him," was his resolution over the dead body of his brother, and in the consoling philosophy of his religion he found relief.

This enthusiasm for everything British is reflected in the furnishings of his palaces. Although they were built by Arab architects in noble Arab style, they are furnished with goods which His Highness ordered from England. The decoration of his main reception-room—I almost called it throne hall—is a picture of

King George VI, the distant King. The Sultan considers himself the King's regent.

At the audience in the palace I met the Sultan's brother, Sultan Achmed. He was even more civilized. He did not feel at home at Lahej, and he actually said so. To him his native country was limited in possibilities. His mind was striving towards bigger and better things. England and English culture were his idols. He was so British in his outlook and mentality that he took on that trait of the truly British character which expresses itself by writing letters to the editor of *The Times*. At this afternoon reception Sultan Achmed showed me his latest epistle. It was a nice little note written on the golden notepaper of the Sultan, urging the British to counteract the radio propaganda of the Italians. He gave me the letter to read, and to mail, and I bear witness that it was sent on the next boat. I do not know the policy of *The Times*, but this highly important note, written by a man who is an ardent believer in British supremacy and an expert in native affairs of his own country, has not yet been published so far as I know.

I liked my stay in Lahej, and it seemed that His Highness was also pleased with my visit. Unfortunately I could not remain in his palace longer than that one day; I had to go back to Aden to be present at Aden's "Coming of Age", and to keep a promising dinner engagement. Shortly before sunset Mohammed called for me with his car. "We have to hurry, sahib," he said. "It is a difficult task to drive through the desert in darkness."

CHAPTER IX

THIRTY-TWO SULTANS AND ELEVEN GUNS

ON the trip back from Al-Houtah to Aden my car was only one of a mixed cavalcade. I joined the Count of Lahej travelling to Aden to attend the celebration of Aden's becoming a Crown colony. Leading the procession was the Sultan's magnificent Austin, with a body modelled after the cars of the Court of St. James, followed by the dilapidated baby Austin of Vizier Abdullah, and finally my (that is Mohammed's) new Graham-Page.

We arrived in Aden after dark. The city lights were turned on, and in the glare of the many candelabras we saw Aden festively decorated for its great day. From the roofs of the houses flags waved. Sweepers were cleaning the main square. And in front of Queen Victoria's little statue stood a grandstand, erected to accommodate the Governor and his suite and all the guests invited to the ceremony.

I had to hurry, as I had little time for my engagement. One of the political officers, just returned from the interior, had sent word to my hotel to have dinner with him and his wife in his house. Having showered the desert's sand from my exhausted body, and changed from the shorts and shirt of the day to a formal evening dress, I rushed off to keep this appointment.

In his house my host received me cordially.

The most striking thing about the house was its





COMING ASHORE WITH PEARL-OYSTERS

two huge reception-rooms. One, the European, was in the true Victorian tradition, filled with furniture, and the walls lined with books and paintings. A typical English drawing-room minus the fireplace. The other reception-room was reserved for the native visitors of my host. True to the ascetic simplicity of the Arabs, nothing adorned the whitewashed walls of the hall. The only furniture consisted of a long bench which ran along the walls. It was covered with heavy Oriental rugs and soft cushions.

My host received me in the European room. But I insisted: "Please let's go and talk in your Arabian room. I feel much more at ease there than in this European atmosphere."

My host liked the idea. "You see," he said with a kind smile, "that's exactly how I feel. There is a closer and warmer contact in my Arab room, and conversation is freer and friendlier. The emptiness of that room is full of possibilities. You furnish it with your own imagination. That is what gives Arab gatherings an inimitable touch of intimacy." Carrying our glasses, we walked over to the Arab hall and sat down on the cushions, folding our legs in the real Arab fashion.

I told him of my strange experiences of the past days, but he did not seem disturbed. I knew that Italian activity caused many sleepless nights and anxious days to the men in the Residency, yet they never admitted that they were really worried by it. I was amazed by the calm philosophy of the English official.

I asked: "What *is* England's policy in governing Aden?"

His answer was quiet. "We British are proud of not being proud, as Chesterton said somewhere. And our policy here is having no fixed policy. We deal with our problems as they come up.

Nobody can deny that we face them with courage and efficiency. You talk of dangerous alien propaganda. Well, go out and ask the natives if they have any ground for complaint. You'll find that they trust us, and believe in our sincerity. Italian propaganda is successful only with the shiftless among them, and it would be no difficult task for us to buy back these seemingly ardent believers in Fascist promises were we to offer only one rupee more than the Italians are willing to pay. Why should we spend money on these scoundrels? Just as we know how rotten and unscrupulous they are, the majority of the Arabs know it too. Therefore they constitute no danger, never!"

I contradicted: "Colonel Jacob, the former Political Secretary, said a few years ago that since the War Arabia has looked to Great Britain as her friend. But today Britain is in danger of losing that position."

"Yes," the official answered, "I remember what Colonel Jacob said. Just as Islam allows a man four wives at a time, and Nature steps in and insists that there be a favourite, so in the world of nations Arabia will have several friends, but there will always be one favourite. I am convinced that we shall always be that best friend. We have been in Aden for a hundred years. We know the land and its people. They've gone through good times and bad times during these hundred years—but they always remained loyal to us, because somehow they felt that we were loyal to them. This confidence gives me faith for another hundred years to come."

Where I was now sitting the native rulers used to sit and discuss their troubles with this man. Whenever they entered this hall they forgot the cunning, roundabout ways of Oriental politics. Here they were sincere and frank, as if alone with their own conscience. This was the strength of this English

official, and this is the corner-stone of British policy in the Orient. As we went on talking we spoke of Britain's hundred years of history in Aden. My host was an expert of Aden's past, and here told the story of the events which led to the capture of the town ninety-nine years ago. In 1839 the Honourable Court of Directors of the East India Company, who virtually owned India, sent Captain Haines to Aden for the purpose of purchasing it from the Sultan Muhsin of Lahej. At that time Aden was a village of about 500 inhabitants, wretched subjects of the Sultan who had his seat some twenty-five miles inland, in Al-Houtah. At that time steamers were about to replace the sailing ships, and the Company was badly in need of a coaling station for her boats coming from England along the Cape route. Aden was the only useful spot. Therefore Aden had to capitulate.

The Honourable Directors despised the word "conquest". Captain Haines approached Sultan Muhsin with an offer, but found the old Arab possessing "all the cunning, avarice and dishonesty of an Asiatic". He was open for a bargain, and named his price. His son Achmed, however, and with Achmed the independent chieftains of the territory, opposed the sale. After useless persuasion and huge bribes, Haines learned the truth of the old Arab saying that a kick should always precede discussion. He went back to Bombay and informed his employers that Aden could be included in their territory only by conquest.

Haines returned somewhat later at the head of an invading army. The Company had been awaiting an excuse for armed invasion. It was the regular practice of the natives to rob shipwrecks; so when the Company's boat *Darya Daula* was attacked by the Sultan's pirates and her crew and passengers barbarously treated the excuse was at hand. Haines renewed his offer in the shade of his guns.

"Haines's army was a small one," my host explained. "He came with 300 Europeans and 400 Hindu soldiers. Haines's dilapidated guns were aimed only at the forts and the shore batteries of the Arabs. Even when every other effort failed Haines still tried his best to avoid a battle. On board his ship he received the emissary of the Sultan and offered 8,000 reals—an immense sum for the time—for Aden's surrender. By the time the offer reached Sultan Muhsin, the figure dropped to 6,000 reals. The Sultan's Arab emissary tried to pocket the difference, thinking of his personal enrichment even in times of national emergency. You mustn't blame him. This is the nature of the Arab, an essential part of his character." The Englishman tried to defend an eternal kink in Arab mentality.

The Sultan's reply was proud and self-confident. He sent his envoy back with the message: "Let the English take Aden! Sell it I never will!" Haines expected this answer. His guns were already manned, his men stood at the boats, everything was ready for the attack. On January 11th, 1839, at 11.45 a.m., British troops landed at Aden; and ten minutes later Mate Rundle, of the landing-party, planted the first English flag on the house of the Sultan.

The official went on, comparing past and present: "When Captain Haines landed," he said, "his first thoughts were for the wounded of the enemy. It was a petty affair compared with the recent battles at Negheli or Amba Alaji in Abyssinia. At Aden 139 natives were killed and a few hundred wounded. But even before British casualties were treated, Haines assigned his surgeon, Dr. Malcolmson, to the Arabs. He distributed money among the families of the dead, and only forty-eight hours after the conquest normal life returned to Aden. Now, look across the water. More than a year has elapsed since Italy conquered Abyssinia, and there is still turmoil, chaos, fight

and battle—Italian 'planes still bomb innocent civilians."

The task of pacifying Aden was not so simple, however. Haines succeeded in forcing Sultan Muhsin into submission. But the Sultan was only one, and not even the most important, of a group of sultans, sheikhs, emirs and chiefs who were all independent on their own dunghill. The Arabs say: "There exists no *one* king—each one is king in his own territory." The Bedouin tribesmen go even further, and in a proud proverb they declare: "We tribesmen are free—we follow no sultans—we rule ourselves." Which is amazingly similar to Britain's very own "my house is my castle".

According to the age-old rules of tribal hierarchy, the British had to deal with each of the chieftains separately. Almost every village in the hinterland insisted upon sovereignty. Force was used only in the utmost necessity. England tried to reach a friendly agreement with the natives, to make treaties in which they considered the Arabs partners on equal footing. This demanded endless patience, tremendous diplomatic skill. Today this small piece of land between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, an area of some 2,500 square miles (the size of the county of Lincolnshire), consists of eighteen protectorate States and confederations, in which rule thirty-two sultans, sheikhs, emirs, recognized by Britain as the heads of their own tiny "States". Yet the Aden protectorate is a homogeneous unit under the British flag.

In most of the cases money did the work of arms. Political officers left Aden, penetrated the hinterland, and came to terms with the chief, whom they recognized as a contract-partner. I saw copies of these treaties. They are written in the picturesque language of Arabia, and contain hardly any commitments on either side. No stipend is mentioned, and in fact the

Residency denies the existence of regular monthly subsidies. The size of the subsidy varies according to the importance of the chief. But even the highest amount appeared small to me. The ruler of Lahej received the most, £50 monthly. There are tribal chiefs in the Yafai, however, who are given as little as £1 a month.

I was told that the treaties have no sentimental value; the chiefs love him who gives money, and they are not particular in selecting the donor. They have become accustomed to the monthly stipend, and depend upon it; in most cases it is their only revenue, since they had to sacrifice the old means of making money. Previously, the only source of their income was raiding each other, thus the thrifty wealth of the hinterland was in perpetual circulation. Britain made order, and punished bandits, pirates, highwaymen. A European who knows the interior well told me that the day Britain abandons the system of stipends—the chiefs will abandon Britain. They would return to the political protection of the Imam of Sana and to the ghrazzu, the tribal raids, which to them is like cricket to the Englishman.

The money which England pays helps to maintain the treaties. It is like pocket-money to pacify spoiled children. The Arab loves money but he deplures keeping it. There is an Arab saying: "Money is good only to spend", and the recipients of this pocket-money are faithful to the old proverb. Thus Britain's spoiled children of the hinterland are often in financial trouble.

The chiefs do not collect the stipend personally, but send an emissary for it. To identify this envoy the Government issues a rubber stamp, and it has become an established industry in Aden to make loans against pawning the stamp. As in medieval German courts, Jews are the bankers of the hard-pressed Arab rulers. They advance the money and get the stamp in

exchange. Thus on paydays, instead of the emissary of the ruler, the envoy of the Jew arrives to cash in at the Residency, and his claim is honoured since he holds the stamp.

Even the loan slips through the fingers of the light-minded chiefs, and soon they are again badly in need of their monthly baksheesh. In such cases His Highness, or whatever his title is, comes personally to Aden. He is received with all the pomp and honour due a native ruler; the guns of the batteries boom the salute, and the Political Secretary dons his uniform to receive the visit of His Majesty's protected Sultan. The native ruler proudly acknowledges the splendid reception, but once alone with the official he is a bashful and remorseful little boy.

"I came to tell you," he says, "that a Jew visited me a short while ago. With cunning tricks he persuaded me to present him with my stamp. Now I have no stamp any more, and consequently I have no money. I wonder," he requests, "what could be done to recover the stamp—not for me . . . oh no. . . . But it needn't remain in the possession of the Yehuda, the dog."

The official smiles . . . and the chief promptly receives a new stamp. When on payday the Jew arrives to cash the stipend he is turned down. The old stamp has been voided. The result of this practice—pawning the stamp and getting a new one—is that stamps are still pawned; only the rates have dropped. Jews will not lend more than the amount of one month's stipend, since they know that the second month the chief will apply for a new stamp.

In addition to money, Britain had other gifts in store. She recognized the ancient high-sounding titles of the tribal chiefs. There are today in the protectorate twenty-four chiefs who call themselves Sultans, seven

whose title is Sheikh, and one Amir. This is not all. According to Arab custom all the members of a sultan's family are addressed as sultan; the name goes, of course, for sheikhs and emirs. The title mania of the Arabs, with which only the many German Hofrats, Geheimrats and Studienrats can compete, goes further; apart from these secular titles there are many spiritual ones which are derived from the Koran, such as Imam, that means priest, and Quadhi, the judge. Almost every Arab who is no longer a Bedou puts the title "Sayed" in front of his name. It means something like "Exalted Master".

My interpreter was a Sheikh, my porter a Sayed, and one of the members of the crew of the boat in which I crossed the Red Sea was a genuine Sultan, the fifth son of the Yafai ruler. With merely mister before my name I felt very small in this army of title-holders.

Another easy means of feeding the pride of these eternal aristocrats is to salute them with guns whenever they turn up in Aden. In the protectorate there are two sultans who are entitled to eleven guns: their Highnesses the Sultans of Lahej, and of Mukalla and Shihr; and four who are greeted with nine guns: the Fadhli Sultan of Shuqra, the Amiri of Dhala, the Sultan of Socotra, and the Sultan of the Lower Yafai.

The Arabs call the boom of the saluting batteries the "salaam of the guns", and are infinitely proud of the noise. The officials of the Residency take great care in observing these rules. Whenever the visit of a High One is announced the A.D.C. of the Governor looks up the exact number of "salaams" due him. The officers of the Residency are not particular about those who have no guns assigned. If there is something the Residency wants from a visitor who officially has no guns in his honour, he is received with a few salutes,

usually four, and the boom of the guns paves the way for negotiations.

Seated on the soft cushions of the Arab reception-hall in the political officer's house I thus learned the intricate system of British rule in Aden, a system that has proved successful down the years with a minimum application of force. The officer spoke to me about Britain's hand in ruling the multitude of protectorate States, and the next day, April 1st, Aden celebrated its coming-of-age. Until now this piece of land belonged to the Indian Empire. This governmental unity was a remnant of the past, and did not work to the satisfaction of Downing Street. Now Aden was about to be torn away from India to come under the direct jurisdiction of the London Colonial Office.

In the house of the political officer I learned that in the future the Colonial Office would share the rule of Aden with the Foreign Office, the political department being assigned to the latter. The bureaucracy of the Indian administration had no understanding for the ticklish task of the political officers who were responsible for peace and order in the protectorate States. The Foreign Office, master of secret diplomacy, was expected to show more understanding.

Before I left his house the officer said: "Today Aden is united in goodwill and mutual confidence. The Arabs trust only those governments that let them alone in their domestic affairs. Very early we discovered this trend of Arab mentality, and tried our best to keep it in mind, this imperative point which—in our opinion—is the only sensible means of governing the Arabs without ruling them."

These wise words were confirmed the next day when I saw the unity, emphasized by the political officer, represented in the festive gathering to celebrate Aden's becoming a Crown colony. To escape the hellish heat of the day the festival was scheduled for

early morning. Aden donned its Sunday-best. From the roofs of the houses a grotesque symphony of flags greeted the early risers. In every business house of the Crescent there is a consular representative of a foreign country. It became chic for every Aden merchant to become a consul, even if he represented only as remote countries as Chile or Paraguay. Now the flags of the most exotic countries were lined up to greet His Excellency the Governor. But the Italian tricolours dominated. Just as at home in Italy, the Italians cherish their flags abroad too; and from every Italian's window there flew the green-white-red flag of Italia—the largest of all, almost eight yards in length, from the roof of the Casa d'Italia. In fact, there were more Italian than British flags displayed at this family feast of the British Empire.

On the little square facing the blue waters of the bay, under the arcades of the pretty little grandstand, the notables of Aden gathered. There was Mr. Cowasjee Dinshaw, the wealthy Indian merchant, who, I believe, represented most countries in the world as honorary consul. There were the British directors of the Thomas Luke Company, the Italian owners of the Aden Salt Works, the French missionaries . . . the cream of Aden.

In the front row sat the rulers of the many protected States in their gorgeous native uniforms, colourful costumes, with splendid curved swords hanging from heavily embroidered belts. Shortly before the ceremony started, rolling majestically slow, the huge Austin of His Highness Sir Abdul Kadhîr, the Sultan of Lahej, arrived. The Sultan wore the obligatory frock-coat under his cape, a cross between the robe of an Anglican priest and the uniform of a night-club doorkeeper. He was accompanied by his son, his brother, and one of his grandsons, the latter dressed in a cheap European ready-made suit, but barefoot.

Sir Abdul Kadhîr was serious and dignified, his brother Sultan Achmed beamingly amiable, the Crown Prince bored, the little prince amazed. Colonel Lake went to the car of the Sultan and greeted the vassal ruler with a deep and sincere bow. For a short moment His Highness might have believed that he was still the ruler of Aden, but this faint impression lasted only a few seconds. The light breeze of Aden brought the sound of cantering camels, and in the curve of the Residency appeared first the row of the escorting camel corps, then the complete escort of the Governor. The Aden protectorate levies rode their swift camels with infinite poise, the little panels on their lances waved fresh in the breeze; the whole scene became electrified—immensely impressive in its puritan modesty.

The military band started "God Save the King" and the distinguished guests of the grandstand stood to attention; the Indian merchant, the Italian consul, the Sultan of Shuqra—all of us were carried away by an indefinable regard for Britain's authority.

The square was filled with a spectacular crowd: town Arabs from the Crater, Bedouin from the Hadhramauth, sailors from Muscat, and guests from the Yemen. They came because they liked noise and pomp and colour. Now they themselves were extras in a picturesque show, silent and full of expectation, with a reverence in their hearts as the band played "God Save the King."

It was a short festival, the main feature being the first public appearance of His Excellency's new uniform. It resembled the uniform of a Liberian Field-marshal, the shining white cloth heavily laden with belts, ribbons and medals, and, to complete the picture, the fresh breeze toyed playfully with the unruly feathers of His Excellency's brand new white cocked hat.

The short speeches were soon over, the crowd

silently listening and holding its breath, and then again the Anthem was played. As a final climax the guns started booming the royal salute. This was the roaring sign for the natives to make merry. The noise of the guns was almost drowned by the loud shouts and cries of this colourful multitude as they danced and hopped and rejoiced about an event the significance of which they did not even try to understand. For them it was merely a fantasia, not as hot and frolicsome as their own native festivals, but still enough to help forget the troubles of the day. In one thing all present were united—respect and admiration for the impressiveness of His Excellency.

CHAPTER X

A FUR MERCHANT ARRIVES IN HODEIDA

THE ceremony over, I dashed to the post office. For the first time in history Aden became independent, even in a philatelic sense. The Government was issuing stamps of the protectorate while previously Aden had used Indian postage. The issue of these new stamps was preceded by great excitement, artificially created by the Government, since it did not make public the designs on the new stamps, but said that it would be a pleasant surprise to the natives, the design being selected from scenes of native life. It was natural for the town to circulate wild rumours, even in connection with a simple stamp issue. Thus I was not surprised to find a long queue waiting at the post office for the opening of the wickets.

At the stamp window stood a funny-looking little man. He was small in stature, and had an ugly, malicious face; his features betrayed doggedness. He wore a light white linen suit, but, in sharp contrast to the tropical outfit, his head was covered with a heavy shako-like headgear of black sheepskin. This was the earmark of his being a Yemenite. The Aden Arabs wear turbans and tarbooshes, but in the Yemen the sheepskin-cap introduced by the Turks, who for centuries were masters in the Imam's country, is still popular. This headgear, which looks definitely out of place here in Aden, only a few degrees north of the Equator, was brought to the Yemen from

the mountains of Anatolia, and survived the Turks.

The little man was nervous. He pressed his ugly harelip together and with his long, bony fingers he beat the devil's tattoo. It was obvious that no philatelic passion brought him to the post office so early. In his hand he held a huge letter, addressed in great caligraphic letters, and he was anxious to mail it as soon as possible. He could not contain himself, and when the Hindu clerk was late in opening the window he knocked on the glass and cursed the postal administration.

I forgot the excitement about the new stamps. I even forgot to secure a place for myself in the queue. I could not explain why, but something uncanny about this little man attracted me. I watched him as he quickly became a nuisance.

Now the wicket was open, and his huge letter was placed before the clerk. "Registered!" commanded the little man, and asked: "How much is it?"

The clerk looked at the address, and then, flabbergasted, up at his client. The letter was addressed to *The Administration in Heaven*. The Hindu clerk was confused:

"I can't accept a registered letter for Heaven," he said, and added quite seriously: "We have no rates for there."

The little man was not disturbed. "Then change the address," he said, "and send it to hell instead."

"I'm sorry," the clerk retorted, "but I have no rate for hell either."

Now the little man became pensive. The spiritual world had no other departments, and he was thinking hard to whom he might send his epistle. It contained a complaint about the state of affairs in Aden, and he considered no worldly authority worthy of the receipt

of his lamentations. But finally he made up his mind and said: "All right, change it to the Viceroy of India!"

By then the crowd was watching the queer little fellow, forgetting all about the new stamps. I stood next to him, amused and amazed, and when, his task accomplished, he turned away from the counter, he ran into me. He stopped, scrutinized me, then exclaimed: "Well, if it isn't Mr. Farago! I've been looking for you for days!"

I had the uneasy feeling which overcomes one when talking to drunkards or lunatics. My man made a polite bow and, without telling me who he was, pulled a note-book from his pocket and started asking questions: "When did you arrive in Aden, and what made you come here?" I did not know what to say, and since I wanted to get rid of this obtrusive little chap I asked him to visit me at my hotel.

He arrived punctually at the appointed hour. I offered him drinks, but he declined: "I never drink with Europeans!" Again his little note-book was out, and he was inquisitive to the smallest detail. My past, my present, and also my future interested him immensely, and, as when dealing with lunatics, I told him everything he wanted to know.

When his questions ebbed I asked him: "And now tell me who you are!"

The little man replied: "I am the Slave of God! I am here to watch over this Yemen country which the Ingliz unlawfully hold."

So he was a Yemen patriot, and no lunatic. Up to the eighteenth century Aden and its hinterland had been part of the Yemen, and the Imams of Sana have never renounced their claim to it, even though, in 1782, the Sultan of Lahej revolted and separated the Aden territory from the Yemen. Ever since, the Imams

have had their henchmen in Aden, and make unconcealed irredentist propaganda for the return of Aden to the Yemen mother country. What for a handful of Yemen politicians in Aden was a serious question and firm conviction was only a crazy delusion to him. It was quite obvious that he represented the Yemen in a capacity similar to inmates of lunatic asylums who believe themselves Napoleons or the Chinese emperor.

I began to regret that I had told him so much about my plans, because this little fanatic was very outspoken in his views. He openly cursed the British, and I tried to counteract his philippic: "But you mustn't forget," I said, "that England did a lot for Aden and its people."

He was not impressed. "We don't care," he said; "we prefer to live on bare rocks—alone, rather than in paradise with the Ingliz!"

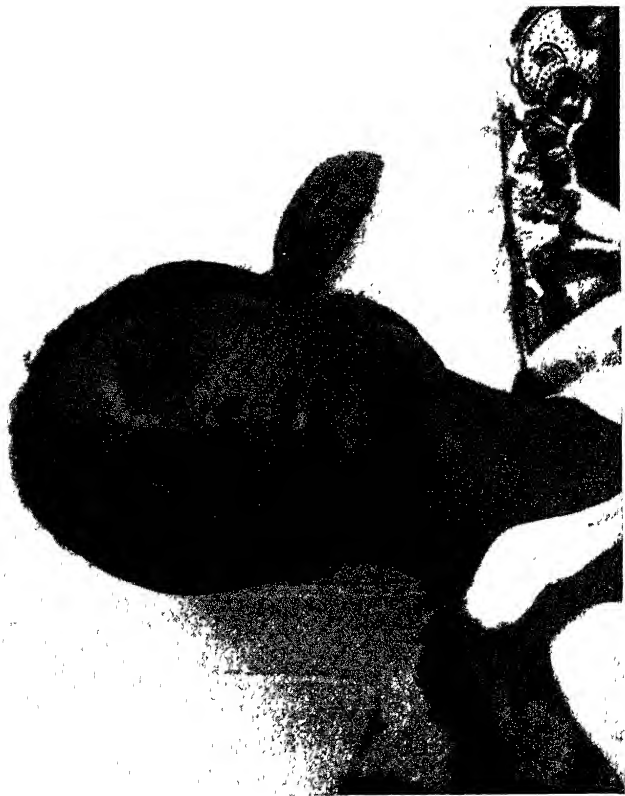
Suddenly Ali came bursting into my room, desperately shouting: "Don't talk to that man, sahib, for God's sake, don't talk to that man!" And turning to the little man, who was pale and speechless, he shouted: "What do you want here, you bastard of a dog and a pig?"

"Don't talk to me like that, Ali," he said, "or I shall write a complaint to the Residency."

Ali went on raging: "Write letters, you snake, you shame of a mother, you sweetheart of goats! Do what you want, but get out of here, and don't show up again, or I will break my leg on your seat!"

Ali controlled the situation in which I had no part to play, and acted as if he were really willing to break his leg, whereupon the little chap hastily disappeared.

Still breathless with fury, Ali gave me a letter and said: "Your permit arrived from the Yemen. We



A SOMALI-ARAB BEAUTY. AGED ABOUT SEVENTEEN



DRESSED FOR THE FEAST

can leave tonight, if you wish, the *Ayamonte* is sailing around midnight for Hodeida."

The letter had been brought to Aden by a Sana merchant who delivered it to Ali. It was written in polite French, in the Foreign Minister's own hand, and signed: Quadhi Muhammed Ragheb bin Rafiz, commanded by His Majesty "le Roi de Yemen". I was glad and worried at the same time, chiefly because there was a passage in the letter which disquieted me. Ragheb Bey wrote: "His Majesty graciously gives his consent to your entering Hodeida on behalf of our esteemed friend Monsieur Klar to buy skins and furs for his firm." Besides, there was what Ali told me about the little fanatic: his was the career of an Oriental scoundrel who was unscrupulous enough to make trouble.

"The man is crazy, we know. But those who are far away from here, and are in touch with him only by letter, don't know, and trust him. I did not want to tell you, but now you ought to know that this man wrote articles against you in Egyptian papers, and told bad things about your aims in the Yemen. I hope he has not written the same things to Sana. If he has, we will have a hard time explaining the reverse of everything that he wrote."

"Who is this chap?" I asked.

"He is the slave of the devil, a sick man stricken by the Evil One. He comes of good stock, his kinsmen are respected and wealthy Yemenis, but he was banished a few years ago. He came to Aden; you see, anybody can come to Aden. He had no money, and no desire to make some in an honest way, so he did what every lazy Arab does: he went to the Catholic Mission, was baptized and supported by them. He was a good Catholic as long as the Mission gave him money; when the support ceased he went to the Scotch Mission, was baptized again, this time a

Protestant, and received support from them. So he passed all Missions and all creeds, until there were no more Missions and no more religion left. The bad man was full of resource. He founded his own religion, which worshipped fish. He found quite a few disciples, this fake apostle, until the Government stepped in and forbade the services. He was about to be sent back to the Yemen, but he lamented and whimpered, and said that he was a political refugee. The Ingliz knew nothing about his affairs, and permitted him to stay. It's too bad, sahib, that you told him so much! Wallah! He is the Imam's spy!"

I was worried about this untimely happening. But I had no time to lose; if I missed the boat that sailed that night I would have to wait another four weeks. Ships to the Yemen are rare. With Ragheb Bey's note I dashed to the Residency, and asked leave from an official. He gave me a letter of introduction to a certain Sahib Saleh Jafar, the Government's agent in Hodeida, a native political officer, who had rendered excellent service in the Hadhramauth, but who was paralysed in the Yemen. The Political Secretary told me that I was not to expect much from his assistance. In the Yemen Saleh Jafar was an unwanted foreigner, tolerated, but hated.

The boat that was about to take me to Hodeida was owned by Cowasjee Dinshaw, the wealthy Parsee who operated three tiny steamers tramping between Suez and Mukalla. His boats have no fixed schedule and no fixed routes. They lift anchor whenever they have sufficient cargo, and decide the route according to the additional cargo taken on during their voyage.

Passengers are rare and unimportant. The whole boat is dedicated to the merchandise of the Red Sea: to the coffee of Mocha, the skins and hides of Hodeida, the pearls and nacles of Jeizan. Sometimes passengers

embarked at Aden bound for Port Sudan, but in Hodeida the captain would receive instructions to make for Jeddah and Tor instead. The passengers would have no alternative; they would have to sail all round the Red Sea, visiting almost all the ports except the one for which they were bound, and after four weeks of tramping in the Red Sea they would arrive back in Aden looking for another chance and knowing they would be taking another risk.

I was assured that my boat was definitely going to Hodeida, since it was the first port of call. Shortly before midnight I, accompanied by Ali I, my secretary, and Ali II, my boy, I went aboard. The boat was named *Ayamonte*, after a tiny village on the Spanish-Portuguese frontier. Nobody in the ship's company knew who had chosen this name for a boat that had nothing to do with Spain, or with the sardines that furnished the income to the 9,000 inhabitants of the Spanish village. She was born some forty years ago in Kiel, Germany, and specially built for trading in the Baltic Sea. The winters in the Baltic are long and bitterly cold. Therefore an ingenious Teutonic ship-builder placed all her staterooms in the immediate vicinity of the boilers. This arrangement permitted the heat of the boilers to penetrate into the cabins, and helped to make them warmer and cosier. It might have been a blessing in the Baltic, but it certainly was a curse in the Red Sea. The hellish heat drove me from my cabin up to the lofty and airy deck, where I spent the night sleeping on a deck-chair.

Early in the morning the powerful rays of the tropical sun drove me from my improvised night's lodging. *Ayamonte* had just passed the straits of Bab al Mandeb; we were sailing by the island of Perim, at about eight knots an hour, northward bound. The eastern shore was clearly visible, for at this spot the

Red Sea narrows to ten to twelve miles across. We took our course close to the eastern shores, and as we steamed further into the Red Sea the western shores slowly faded away and there was left only the glittering waters and the bending horizon.

I climbed the bridge to meet Captain Strong, the skipper, who commanded a native crew of some twenty sailors. He was an old friend of mine, and while in Aden my regular companion for sunset whiskies on the terrace of the "Marina." A strange fate had swept him down to the Orient. A Lieutenant-Commander in the Royal Navy during the war, he had commanded a destroyer. After the Armistice he retired, but he was too restless to sit in his little cottage in Durham, doing nothing.

During the long winter nights in the inn of the Durham village a needy adventurer, with a persuasive tongue, told tales about the wealth of the unexploited Red Sea islands, and finally succeeded in dragging the captain into an enterprise that had a bad ending. Together they formed a company to exploit the guano which was more abundant on the coral islands, the shady business-man informed the naive Captain, than anywhere else. The enterprise was a failure, and the Captain, stranded in Aden, had to return to the sea. He was an old salt, approaching his seventieth year. He had to be content with the job that Cowasjee Dinshaw offered him on the bridge of the *Ayamonte*.

This perfect master excelled himself in what, at first, looked like a sinecure. For him the Red Sea had no mysteries, no tricks, no hidden secrets. In the years he spent sailing up and down the Red Sea he learned to know the moody currents of this unreliable water and its rapidly changing deceitful winds better than any other living being. In his log-room he had a handwritten chart-book infinitely superior to the

official Red Sea pilot book. He knew the depth of the sea at any point. He knew all the regular, as well as the emergency, harbours. He knew the hidden bays which offered refuge in heavy gales; he knew the coral islands above and under the surface of the water, and the sea could offer him no sudden surprises. In fact, he had a strange distinction among the few Red Sea skippers: he was the only master sailing the Red Sea coast who had not an accident on his record. All the others—there were three other British captains sailing the sea—had run ashore more than once, and hardly ever returned to Aden without at least one scratch on their hull from a submarine coral.

I found Captain Strong at the steering-wheel in a picturesque uniform. He wore khaki shorts, white polo shirt, and pyjama coat decorated with the four golden stripes of a captain, and a battered topee. There was a romantic touch about the wretched ship and her veteran master.

His crew worshipped him, and so did I after having spent a few hours on the bridge. The unconventional, informal manners of this pleasant Englishman were a relief to me after the wearing mannerisms of the Arabs, which, just like their dishes, were pressing heavily on my stomach.

After thirty-six hours at sea we sighted Hodeida. I stood on the bridge at dawn as the first contours of the distant town appeared on the horizon. Slowly the haze of the Arabian morning was raised by invisible hands, and like a fantastic setting on an operatic stage Hodeida presented itself to me. From the distance all Arab towns look pretty and impressive. Hodeida looked like a coastal metropolis. Its houses were high, and generously whitewashed. The broad street, stretching along the seashore, seemed like the promenade of a fashionable resort somewhere in the south of France.

From the distance Hodeida was enchanting and inviting.

Captain Strong prepared his boat for anchorage. On the bridge stood his Goanese helmsman, sounding the depth of the sea, and his monotonous voice echoed over the waters: "Fourteen . . . eleven . . . nine . . . eight . . . eight . . . eight!"

We were still far out at sea, but the water was rapidly vanishing from under the *Ayamonte's* battered hull. Some two miles from the shore the sea's depth was only eight fathoms. Captain Strong stood by the ship's telegraph and cursed the Yemen Government: "Those damned fools," he said, "they only make our lives difficult with their silly backwardness. Hodeida has no natural harbour. A few years ago a French survey ship discovered a perfect harbour only half a mile to the north, and offered to develop it, free of charge. The Imam protested: 'To hell with the steamers; they only mean evil to us. The old harbour was good enough for our ancestors, it ought to be good for their descendants!' He is like that. There is a decaying jetty in Hodeida, and we wanted to repair it, but he refused permission, saying that Allah wanted the jetty to decay, and man must not interfere with Allah's will. 'Why build jetties,' he asked, 'when for the same money we can build mosques?'"

The Goanese shouted desperately: "Seven fathoms, Captain!" and Strong swung the telegraph. It signalled "Stop!" Captain Strong lifted his topee, wiped the sweat from his forehead, and with an ironic gesture, stretched out his arms, pointed to the distant town, and said: "My dear sir, I give you Hodeida, that pearl of all cities!"

The boat came to a full stop in a narrow passage, just deep and wide enough to accommodate the 700 tons of the *Ayamonte*. This passage was known only

to Captain Strong, and he kept his secret to himself. Thus the *Ayamonte* came nearer to Hodeida than any other ship, which meant less expense to Captain Strong's employers, and less work to the coolies who carried out the loading and discharging. They were grateful to Captain Strong, who made life easier for them, and showed their gratitude in a charming way. Only a few months before, when the Captain had anchored off Hodeida, a dhow brought a peculiar deputation to the *Ayamonte*. They were representatives of the coolies, and presented the Captain, in the name of their fellow-workers, with a golden medal, coined in the Royal Mint at Sana, for his "skill in bringing his boat nearest to Hodeida". The Captain told me: "You see, I got the D.S.O. during the War and was mentioned in dispatches. But this medal meant something more to me. Never in my life was I so proud as on that remarkable day."

Hodeida took no notice of our arrival. In fact, it was too early for that town, which awakens only around 9 a.m. Sleeping is the natives' only pleasure in this stronghold of a religious fanatic. Drinks, songs, and smoking are strictly prohibited by law as unworthy of True Believers. The only recreation left to the men of Hodeida is to retire to their harems after sunset and to enjoy the limited pleasures of their wives, and to forget, in a prolonged sleep, the sober emptiness of their daily routine.

After long hours of waiting, suddenly the town awoke. Primitive dhows left the coast, swiftly sailing towards us in the fresh breeze, laden with cargo for the *Ayamonte*. Among the dhows I noticed a tiny canoe, and Captain Strong explained: "There comes His Excellency the Harbour Master!"

"His Excellency" was paddling with his own exalted hands, and it took him more than thirty minutes to reach us. Clumsily he climbed the rope-

ladder, came up to the bridge to welcome the Captain and to examine my passport.

His name was Sayed Achmed bin Ibrahim, a short fellow with a thin face and sleepy eyes. A native of Sana, he was new in his job and in Hodeida. For years he shaved His Majesty the King ; he was the Barber of the Court of Sana until a revolt in Hodeida was followed by a reshuffle of governmental posts. The former Harbour Master was beheaded, and Achmed the Barber was appointed in his place. His modest past was forgotten. Today he was a worthy representative of His Master. The dignity of his office was expressed by a broad red ribbon which he wore over his Arab dress around his breast, and by a battered cartridge-belt in which two bullets were placed. His rifle was carried for him by his favourite slave, who was also his brother-in-law.

In Hodeida Achmed bin Ibrahim stood for the law and everything else that travellers find on arrival in civilized ports. He was the doctor of the non-existent quarantine station ; the chief of an imaginary police force ; the chief immigration officer ; the customs ; the money-changer ; the Salvation Army and the Corporation. In spite of the multiplicity of his offices, he had but little to do. Arabs bound for the Yemen are allowed to land almost without formalities ; Europeans, on the other hand, not at all, unless they have a special permit from the Imam.

My arrival meant additional work for this living combination of duties and offices. After assuring me that he was overwhelmed with joy because of my arrival, he wanted to see my passport. I feared no evil from this official act, even though my passport identified me as a journalist, and I knew that Achmed could not read the alphabet. He examined my neat Hungarian passport, and expressed his appreciation of it. "A beautiful passport," he said, "the most

beautiful passport I ever came across. What nationality are you?"

"I am Hungarian," I said, not without pride, since I knew that I was the first Hungarian who ever crossed the Yemen's border. But Achmed was astonished. "A Hungarian?" he asked. "What is a Hungarian?" I tried to explain:

"In Europe there is a country which is called Hungary, an independent and sovereign state just like your own country." But even this did not satisfy Achmed. He told me that he had never heard of the existence of Hungary, and that I was not telling the truth because he knew there were only four countries in Europe: Britain, France, Germany and Italy. At the same time he tried to help me. "You see," he said, "in Arabia there are only two countries, but numerous tribes. Your Hungarians are probably one of the tribes, like, for instance, we Zaidis in the Yemen." On a piece of paper he accordingly put down that I was a German of the Hungarian tribe.

Now I had to wait until he returned to Hodeida to tell the Vizier, the Governor of Hodeida, everything about me. After his departure the coolies swarmed over the *Ayamonte* and began to discharge the cargo, consisting chiefly of kerosene, salt and matches. These coolies were all African slaves, pitch-black and conspicuously negroid. Their velvety skins were taut over their powerful muscles, and shiny with the rancid butter smeared all over their bodies. Beside the short and thin Arabs of Hodeida these gigantic slaves looked like Gullivers in the land of the Lilliputians. The Arabs are a decadent race; these giants preserve their racial strength through a healthier life; more work and less sleep. And yet the weak-bodied Arabs are their masters, because the Arabs have the rifles and the keys to the arsenals.

Time passed slowly. Achmed did not hurry back

with the message from the Governor. I knew this was according to Arab custom. The longer you have to wait the more you are honoured. The reception of guests means plenty of work and preparation, and these increase with the status of the guests. If you have to wait in the ante-room of an Arab potentate it means that he is preparing his home for your reception. Envoys of the King of England who came to visit the Imam were left waiting for some three weeks. I had to wait for three hours.

Fearing there were complications, I was uneasy and nervous, and smoked one cigarette after another. I had plenty of them, since my friend Nick Athanassacopoulos, the Aden correspondent and tobacco manufacturer, presented me with a large quantity of his brand. Pacing the deck, I caught concealed glimpses of the coolies, who looked at me yearningly whenever I took out my cigarette-case. There was a profound longing for the blue smoke of the forbidden tobacco in their eyes. They could not restrain themselves. Soon one of them came up to me and whispered: "Sahib, give me a cigarette."

I went deep into my reserves, and distributed freely Nick's brand among the negroes. Each one of them received an unbroken package, a fortune to them, for they smoke one secretly for weeks, taking a few hasty, thirsty puffs at a time. My generosity brought disaster to them. When they returned to Hodeida a squealer betrayed the whole crew to Achmed, and they were all put in chains for three months. I saw them in the street the next day. They were hopping along, dragging the heavy chains fixed on their ankles. The cigarettes had been confiscated—and smoked by Achmed, one by one, behind closed doors, in a kind of secret, sacred ceremony.

While waiting for Achmed's return a Turkish gentleman arrived to greet me. He was Sahib Saleh,

the Yemen's unofficial Minister of Communications. He was a remnant of Turkish times, and was left in office because he was a relative of the King by marriage. It was a complicated and confused relationship, and I never really grasped it completely. Saleh had married the daughter of the son of a cousin of a sister of the brother-in-law of the King's eldest son. Even the remotest relationships are carefully observed and seriously respected in the Yemen, and because of the frequent intermarriages in the ruling Zaidi families all the Zaidis are relatives. Wherever I went in the Yemen I found scores of cousins of the King. There are only a few noble families in the Yemen not included in these intermarriages. The members of these families hold no government offices. In democratic phraseology, the relatives of the King are the majority party, while those unrelated to him are the opposition.

Sahib Saleh was the owner of a fleet of five Fords, which were supposed to solve the transportation problems of the Yemen. In fact, he held them as a concession for which he paid heavily. But he had a monopoly. He asked exorbitant prices even for short jaunts, but one had to choose between paying his fees or travelling by camel caravan. There was something that Saleh called a motor road up to Sana. Driving in one of his cars, the distance of 150 miles was covered in from six to ten hours. The caravan, on the other hand, took six to ten days for the same journey. He came to offer me his services, and demanded 80 reals for the trip. I did not even try to bargain. I needed his help and influence.

At last Achmed returned. He invited me into his wretched canoe, and we both paddled to shore. My luggage was to follow later. A house had been prepared for my stay, since Hodeida had no hotels; a house, with semi-European comfort, specially reserved

for foreign notables. In this house slaves were in readiness to serve me, and provisions were stored in abundance. In the courtyard lambs were bleating away, unaware of Mohammed, the cook, who was ready to turn them into spiced, crispy, tender lamb-chops for my dinner-table. I was amazed by the efficiency of a King who found time to act as my *maître d'hôtel*.

CHAPTER XI

THREE WHITE MEN

WHAT I took to be a beautiful example of true Oriental hospitality soon turned out to be quite the reverse. As soon as I was settled in my new home I decided to make a tour of the town. As I stepped out through the gate I was stopped by a couple of policemen posted at my door. More policemen sat in the dust of the street, or stood leaning on their rifles. The look in their eyes and their menacing attitude made it clear that they were by no means a guard of honour. In fact, their leader was tough. He actually pushed me back into the house, an offence which could have happened in no Oriental country other than the Yemen, where the natives are still the masters and we conquerors undesirable foreigners.

Ali was an embarrassed witness of this unpleasant scene. He tried to reassure me : "We are forbidden to leave the house, sahib," he said, "until we have been summoned into the presence of His Excellency the Governor." And then, to calm my anger, he added : "There is nothing extraordinary about this ; it is part of the strict etiquette of Arabia that the first courtesy call of visiting foreigners is reserved for the highest potentate in town ; in Sana for the King, in Hodeida for his Governor." But etiquette or no etiquette, I was a prisoner in my own house. Impatiently I prowled from my rooms into the yard and from the yard back again into my rooms.

Luckily I was permitted visitors. News of an arrival spread like wildfire in this town where a foreigner was still a major event. Ali had told me that the whole of Hodeida's intelligentsia had planned to visit me, but they were waiting on the Vizier's hesitating attitude; the Vizier, as a matter of fact, could not make up his mind how to receive me: whether as a welcome guest or an intruding foe. Therefore, those who did come came either on official business or because they, too, were merely resident foreigners.

My first visitor was an Arab, the local agent of wealthy Ali Bazaara Omar, the Aden merchant. His employer had wired him to render me whatever assistance he could. Next came a messenger from Salah Jafar, His Britannic Majesty's political agent, with salaams and regrets from his master. He confided to me that the English King's Hodeida representative was not much better off than I; he was merely tolerated in the Yemen, and there was nothing he could do to help me.

Unannounced, came my third visitor. Standing in the doorway, he was more a vision than a flesh-and-blood human being—a young man of about thirty, with a feminine face, dreamy blue eyes, and a high, arched forehead. At his temples the faint purple of his veins shadowed the soft white skin. He did not walk; he floated with easy, superhuman step, noiseless, smooth, gentle. His wavy hair challenged the flaming red of his well-groomed beard. My fantasy took wings, and in this mild young man I saw before me Guido Reni's Christ come to life. I stood transfixed—but he soon turned out to be Mr. D., the staff of the Hodeida branch of a British firm of importers.

Mr. D.'s career had started in the firm's London office. Straight from the sparkling glamour

of the London scene, Mr. D. had been transferred to Hodeida, to the barren boredom of Arabia. He was suffering.

Mr. D. was one of the three Europeans tolerated in Hodeida by the Imam; this small group of foreigners, Hodeida's "smart international set", made exactly 0.01 per cent of the population of 30,000 Yemens.' Mr. D. was English; the other two were an Italian and an Armenian, races which have little in common with the calm, emotionless, impenetrable world of the British. Mr. D., like a true Englishman, had carried the banner of splendid isolation from the "rest of Europe" into this desert loneliness; and now his solitude was more than he could bear. When the news of his transfer from London to Hodeida had first reached him it promised a thrilling adventure. His arrival at Hodeida, some ten months before, was the fulfilment of his dreams. He plunged into this strange new world with the blind joy of an explorer; he loved the land and its people, and was willing to accept even its hardships in exchange for the exotic life the Yemen had to offer.

But soon the adventure was over. After a few weeks Hodeida could give him no new thrills and no new adventures. His loneliness bore down on him like the desert heat; and as there was no escape from the monotonous routine of the days, he had become sentimental. "To be sentimental" is a pretty bad state of affairs with the English. Andre Maurois, who knows the British well, once said: "Whenever an Englishman grows sentimental he goes out into the dark and shoots himself." By the time Mr. D. had come to visit me he had just about reached this stage.

In his warm, soft voice he spoke the words of the Prayer Book:

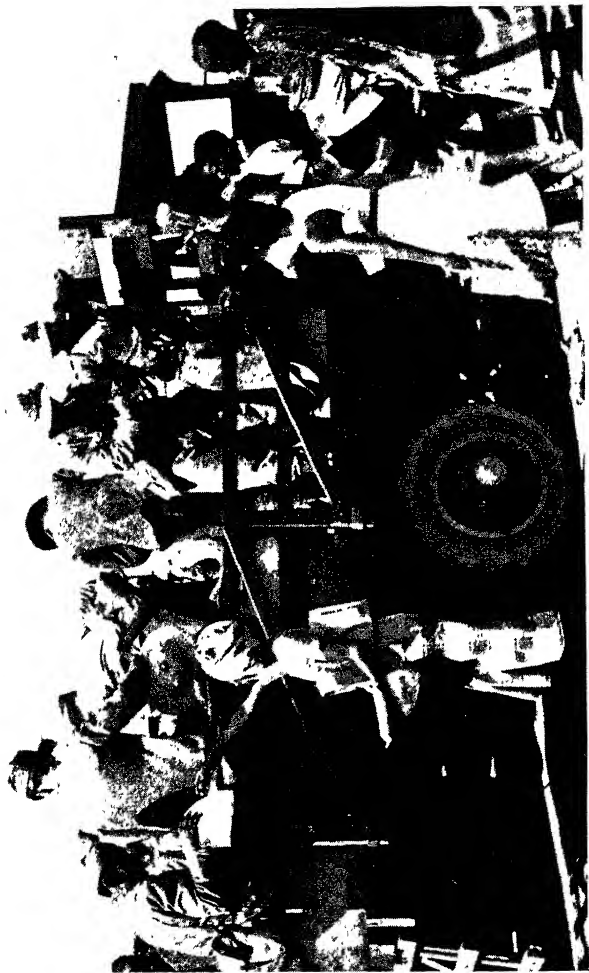
"I'm a religious man," he said; "religion is my last refuge. Before I finally sought haven in the Bible I tried many things to make life in Hodeida bearable. I had brought with me my tennis rackets, my golf clubs, and my gramophone with many good records, cocktail shakers, evening dress, and a selection of good old English drinks. The trouble began with my gramophone.

"It was a fine winter day," Mr. D. continued, "not very hot; my windows were wide open. Soon my house was besieged with inquisitive, excited natives. They could not explain the mystery of the musical-box. Quickly the great news was reported to the Governor. Policemen came and dispersed the crowd. The next day I was asked to call on the Vizier.

"He had no appreciation for my enthusiasm for music. When I entered his reception hall His Excellency exclaimed: 'What tool of the devil have you brought to Hodeida? What is your infernal machine that imitates the voice of man?' I realized that words would be futile, so I sent my boy for the gramophone and played it for him. I went even further. To quell his suspicion I showed him the machinery, the springs, wheels, cranks, all that. After this he was at least convinced that no evil dwarf lived in the captivity of the box—but he still refused to let me play it again without permission from Sana."

In Sana, the Imam summoned his religious advisers and placed the problem of Mr. D.'s gramophone before them. They deliberated for days, and when they finally submitted their report Mr. D. was again asked to see the Governor. He received the Englishman with a broad smile. "I have good news for you, Mr. D.," he said. "His Majesty graciously consents to your using the singing-box, although he is still convinced that it must be the work of the





ITALIAN TROOPS FROM ABYSSINIA BUYING BREAD FROM THE JIBUTI NATIVES

devil. If you want to listen to a machine which dares imitate the voice of man, go ahead—but your strange passion must not corrupt Hodeida's True Believers. By Allah, they must not hear it, no and never! Therefore His Majesty has ruled that you may listen to your diabolic box only when all the doors and windows of your house are tightly shut and when the sea is stormy, so that the sound of the waves drowns the music of your machine."

The tennis outfit met a similar fate. In the stony desert outside Hodeida Mr. D. selected a site, and with the help of his servants built a tolerably good tennis court. Then, lacking a better partner—the Armenian and the Italian agreed with the Arabs in deploring such silly English customs—he started to teach his favourite servant, a handsome boy of sixteen, the science of tennis. The very first lesson was promptly interrupted by the Governor's agent, and Mr. D. was again summoned to the palace. This time he found an even more puzzled Vizier.

"What is this peculiar dance you are teaching your servant?" His Excellency asked.

Mr. D. tried to explain. "It's neither peculiar nor a dance. It's a game, an exercise for the muscles; it makes the body fit. Hundreds of thousands of young men and women play it in Europe and in America, and I hope you will not object to it?"

But the Vizier could not make up his mind, and the case of Mr. D.'s tennis was submitted to His Majesty for final decision. The decision soon came:

"Foreigners are cursed with customs, strange to True Believers, because they make no sense at all. We see no reason why we should interfere with whatever they do so long as it concerns only themselves.

If Mr. D. finds his pleasure in dancing around in the broiling sun and hitting a ball with an instrument, let him do it. But he must do it alone and by himself. Nobody may look at him when he is possessed by this strange demon; and no Arab may so lower himself as to join in what he calls an exercise, but which is in fact the dangerous practice of giving the body preference over the brain. Moslems live their lives according to the commands of the Holy Book; it is full of exhortations that they devote themselves to the knowledge of the Koran, and to all those spiritual commandments of which the Koran is the fountain. Those who have found no portal to the eminence, splendour and depth of Our Book may do with their leisure whatever they deem right. It is our law that everything they deem right is wrong, as the Prophet revealed at Mecca: 'O unbelievers, I will not worship that which ye worship; nor will ye worship that which I worship. Neither do I worship that which ye worship; neither do ye worship that which I worship. Ye have your religion, and I my religion.' And he also said that 'God directeth not the ungodly people. Their reward shall be that on them shall fall the curse of God, and of angels, and of all mankind. They shall remain under the same for ever; their torment shall not be mitigated, neither shall they be regarded; for God is gracious and merciful.' Therefore let no True Believer neglect his spiritual duty for the fancy and senseless new-fangled ideas of a foreigner—may Allah enlighten his soul!"

And so it went on. Whatever Mr. D. wanted to do was prohibited by orders from Sana. Finally he turned to the Bible.

"During the first few months," he explained, "when all these prohibitions were coming from Sana, and His Majesty objected even to my smoking a

cigarette in public and drinking an occasional Scotch-and-soda, I regarded the natives' philosophy with the same bewilderment as they regarded mine. While I was still a complete stranger in the Yemen I believed these men of the Orient crazy. Today I have an uncertain feeling that not they, but we white men, are mad—mad in spite of all our conventions, achievements, learning and teachings. Now our civilization seems just as senseless to me as my tennis did to the Imam. Being so hopelessly alone, the soul of man demands more recreation than the body. I found this recreation in the Bible."

Then, to my profound astonishment, Mr. D. started talking of more practical matters. In fact, he became somewhat too practical. His eyes lost their dreamy expression, and became the indifferent eyes of a very hard-headed Englishman. His dulcet voice turned objective and businesslike. His courtesy call changed to a business meeting.

He was interested in two oil prospectors who were in the Yemen on behalf of an American syndicate, and he was having difficulties on account of them. The oily gentlemen had arrived long before I came, but had made no headway, as the Imam was still considering the need of having oil discovered in his territory.

His Majesty had not forgotten what had become of those countries of the Near East where oil had been discovered—all of them had lost their independence; had become vassals of the companies operating the wells. The syndicates were willing to pay well for their concessions, but Imam Yahya valued the independence of his country more than the money of the foreigners. "Money," he used to say with the Koran, "is only good to spend; independence is only good to keep!"

The people of the Yemen, too, were hostile towards

foreign prospectors, and Mr. D. feared that I might prove indiscreet.

"I suppose *you* know why these two men are in the Yemen," he said to me, "and I would consider it a great favour if you would keep your information to yourself. I'm the only one in Hodeida who knows their real purpose and it would mean trouble to all of us should the natives find it out."

He had already had trouble enough. The prospectors started to bore near water wells which had an oily taste. But the Imam forbade the erection of oil derricks near water wells, since these regions were the Yemen's most fertile parts, envied by all the other Arab countries whose land was sandy, stony and barren.

"We have deserts enough," the Imam said. "Why don't you look for oil in those areas which are useless and not inhabited instead of destroying the plantations of my peasants?" When their search in the desert failed to produce oil, the prospectors abandoned hope and left the Yemen—empty-handed. The patriarchal foresight of the Imam impressed me, for it was gratifying to find at least one country in this greedy age where the common sense of a native ruler thought vegetables more important than fat profits in oil. I promised Mr. D., however, not to speak to anybody in Hodeida about the prospectors.

If my trip to Hodeida did nothing else, it certainly seemed to be a remedy for Mr. D.'s melancholy. I was told later that for weeks after our meeting he completely forgot his personal tragedy. Or perhaps it was only that he had someone to talk with, since the Italian spoke only Italian, and the Armenian no English, and Mr. D. understood neither of their languages. There they were—three white men in a community of hostile natives, complete strangers to

each other : three parallel life-lines running side by side, destined never to meet. Nowhere in the world have I seen the hopelessness of the League of Nations better demonstrated than in Hodeida, where three white men went three different paths.

Mr. D. went off to his Bible, and the Armenian arrived. He spoke a fluent French, and quite a lot of it. Probably because he was angry. He had just come from the Vizier to whom he had gone to complain about the impudence of the tax-collector. Paying taxes was the chief occupation in this native dictatorship, and the three foreigners were no exception. My Armenian had paid his tax promptly, and had been given a neatly printed receipt which he filed with his correspondence. A couple of weeks later the tax-collector was back again.

"But I have already paid it two weeks ago," the Armenian exclaimed in astonishment. "Why should I pay it again?"

The revenue-man insisted that the tax had not been paid, and would not be convinced, even when the Armenian produced the receipt he himself had given him. Raging with fury, the Armenian had rushed to the Vizier with a complaint against the cheating tax-collector. The Vizier listened attentively and then asked to see his receipt. He scrutinized the piece of printed paper and then pronounced: "You did not pay the tax. This is no receipt. This is the XCI Sura of the Koran, torn from the Book."

"You see, *mon ami*," my new friend complained, "such is the Yemen; a country of pious deceivers. *Degoutant, mon ami, croyez moi, degoutant!*" Only now, after he had spilled his story, did he introduce himself. He was Monsieur T., representative of an Aden firm of coffee exporters. He was far from sharing Mr. D.'s defeatism; on the contrary, he was convinced that all the Yemenis were crazy. "A bunch

of thieves, *mon ami*, whose religion is to steal five times a day, and then for atonement to pray five times." He, too, was suffering, but not for want of tennis, gold and drinks. "*Cherchez la femme, mon ami!*" I was very glad Monsieur T. had come to revive me, for Mr. D. had almost succeeded in making a religious maniac of me. He asked a thousand and one little questions, mostly about the night-life of Paris. He regarded his stay in Hodeida as in exile, counting the days, nay, the seconds, until he could return to his beloved *Paree*. But until then—he was an excellent and reliable coffee expert.

When he did not speak of the delights of Paris he spoke of coffee. His only consolation of being banished to Hodeida was that the Yemen was the land of the world's best coffee. It has been grown in the hills around Mocha since time immemorial and is famous all over the world as Mocha coffee. The region is unable to produce enough to satisfy the demand, and year after year the complete crop is sold out in advance. The coffee is packed in bales and shipped to Marseilles, Le Havre and New York. France and the United States are Mocha's best customers. But not all Mocha coffee comes from Mocha, which fact brought forth another score of emphatic "*degoutants*" from Monsieur T. "Very often," he complained, "coffee of an inferior quality is named 'Mocha' although it has never seen the Yemen groves and is in reality of South American origin. But what can you expect? Chianti wine, real champagne and Hungarian paprika are false too. The genuine Chianti, for instance, is the product of a small region in northern Italy, and all the wine produced in Chianti is sold to the Italian King and the Vatican. Nevertheless the whole world sells wine labelled Chianti."

Just as he warmed up to the subject of Italian

vineyards the third white man, the Italian, was announced by Ali. He was a modest little fellow, whose silence increased with the flood of T.'s words. Of the three, he was the only one who had no grievances. He was content with his fate, and profoundly happy to be in the Yemen. Probably because his was a different mission. While D. and Monsieur T. represented commercial firms, the little Italian represented his country, although officially he was a doctor. I noticed he evaded medical conversation. T. later told me that had I asked him to produce a diploma he would have been unable to. As a matter of fact he had none. The Yemenis did not know the difference. His posing as a doctor was a patriotic duty—his country wanted him to do it.

Of the nations with colonies in the Near East, Italy is the one most interested in the Yemen. Ever since they established the colony of Eritrea on the opposite coast, the Italians have been looking across the Red Sea with an eye to adding the Yemen to their colonial empire. While in the case of Ethiopia Signor Mussolini employed the method of conquest, in the Yemen he is using more subtle means. To this end he has made several treaties of trade and friendship with the Imam. The first of these was signed in 1926, the last in 1937. These agreements enabled the little Italian to come and stay in the Yemen. He was there to collect information for Italy and to influence the natives on Mussolini's behalf. In fact, he was an Italian Intelligence Officer, a political agent, since, treaty or no treaty, the Imam did not permit the establishment of foreign consular representatives. Therefore the little Italian agent had to pose as a doctor.

There are eleven foreigners in the whole of the Yemen, and seven of them are Italians. The other six live in Sana as engineers, technicians and doctors.

They are all political agents, a select group of Italy's best. They have their fingers on the pulse of the Yemen, and as a result of their clever activities the Yemen is rapidly falling into the sphere of Italian influence. The only link connecting the Yemen with the outside world is its telegraph station, which is operated by these Italian Secret Service men. Since the line itself goes through Assab in Italian Eritrea, every word entering or leaving the Yemen is immediately known to the Italians across the water.

Italy's best friend in the Yemen is His Excellency Quadi Mohammed Ragheb bin Rafiz, a former Turkish captain, remnant of the times when the Turks were masters. When the Ottoman Empire collapsed and the Turks were driven from the Red Sea by the Allies after the Great War, he stayed to become the Imam's Minister of State. So great is his admiration for Italy and Mussolini that many of his countrymen regard him as the eighth Italian in the country. He often travels to Italy—undoubtedly to report and to receive new instructions. His son is being educated in Rome.

While Italy is permitted to have seven representatives, Britain has not succeeded in persuading the Imam to permit a single one. Although a "treaty of friendship and mutual co-operation" between "His Majesty in respect of the United Kingdom and of India and the King of the Yemen" was concluded in 1934—neither friendship nor co-operation has resulted. Even one little promise by the Imam in its seven insignificant articles was not kept. The policy of "giving plenty of nothing to the Ingliz" is the Imam's traditional attitude which started during the World War, when the Imam wisely exclaimed, "Let the Turks and the Ingliz fight the war!" and retired to Shahara, his second capital in the mountains. At

the end of the war a British delegation tried to get to him, but was unable to reach Shahara. A few years later another British delegation *en route* from Hodeida to Sana was taken captive by Yemeni warriors, and released only on condition that they returned to Aden instead of continuing to Sana. In 1925 a special envoy, Sir Gilbert Clayton, got as far as the capital—but accomplished nothing either.

The Imam's reluctance to accept British protection, or even a British subsidy, was due to the vigorous Yemen irredentist movement. The English are considered usurpers who have held Aden, the "eye of the Yemen", illegally since 1839. The Imam has often made it clear that until Aden is returned he will not come to terms with the British—and since this is very unlikely, genuine friendship is not considered to be possible. An Arab friend of mine said, "Try to milk a he-goat into a sieve; or try to reconcile the Yemeni and the Ingliz. And you shall find that your efforts are wasted!"

In the years between Colonel Jacob's ill-fated expedition in 1925 and the conclusion of the treaty in 1934, the Anglo-Yemeni controversies developed into open hostilities. Imam Yahya never recognized the artificial boundaries between Aden and the Yemen, nor did his warriors respect the English across these—for them non-existent—frontiers. Frontier violations were the order of the day. Bloody battles between loyal Arabs and their Yemeni brethren alarmed British authorities, particularly when these fights spread and would not cease in spite of warnings. Therefore, while sending delegations to Sana soliciting the Imam's friendship, Britain was forced to send up to the threatened provinces quite a different delegation as well as bombers of the Royal Air Force, to "bomb the Arabs into submission", as one of the Aden officials put it.

These unfortunately rather cruel bombardments—as in the case of the Subaihi Caterans, a tribe north-west of Aden, which was almost completely annihilated by the bombers—resulted in what amounted to an undeclared war between the British and the Yemen. The result of this one-sided war is a still existing hatred towards everything that is British, and suspicion of everything that comes from Britain.

While Britain made no headway with her diplomacy in 1928, another unexpected but nevertheless formidable competitor entered the Yemen. Immediately following an especially thorough British bombardment of the Imam's troops at Dala, Soviet agents arrived. Soviet Russia had made a treaty of "commerce and comity" with the Imam. The admitted intention of the Russians was purely commercial. The country was promptly flooded with Soviet wares of third-rate quality, which were sold at a loss to secure preference. What the Soviets really were attempting was the Bolshevization of Arabia. Orders to this end emanated from Moscow.

As with the Italians, the Soviet agents too came in the disguise of professional men. In the first years there were scores of Russians in the Yemen. And today, still, two of the total of eleven foreigners are Russians—a married couple, both husband and wife being doctors. They, and immense quantities of matches of the cheapest quality, reluctant to produce fire, are the last reminders of the Soviet's now abandoned plans. The Bolshevization of Arabia is hopeless, chiefly because Bolshevism, in a primitive and patriarchal form, already exists in the political life of the Arab countries. Russia's sudden love was accepted but never returned by the Imam. He permitted the importation of Russian goods, in exchange for which the Soviet demanded but never got coffee. When their dunning letters became rather rude the Imam

shipped a large number of bales to Russia, the bales supposedly containing coffee. But when the consignment arrived in Odessa and was opened by the Russian customs authorities the contents turned out to be stones—colourful glittering stones collected on the Yemen sea-shore.

Recognizing their defeat the Russians sensibly withdrew their agents. I was told that the last two Russians of Sana were also about to leave for good. With the disappearance of the Soviet agents the Italians alone remained. Since 1926, when the first treaty with Italy was concluded, the influx of Italian agents has never ceased. Most of these Italians came to spend six months, and then went home to allow others to take their places. Thus Italy has quite an army of secret agents who know the Yemen well, have friends there, and could eventually become the leaders of an Italian invasion, either peaceful or armed. Italy has openly admitted imperialistic aims.

But this little Italian, who was sipping coffee with me, looked anything but imperialistic. His outer appearance and methods were all parts of his country's policy. He had to be unassuming and humble in order not to attract too much attention; in his effort he was even living the simple life of the natives. "If you live in the same stream," smilingly he quoted an Arab proverb, "make friends with the crocodiles."

I too tried to follow this advice. But after the three white men of Hodeida had left no new visitors came. It seemed that the crocodiles did not want to make friends with me.

Slowly night fell over Hodeida, and there was no word from the Governor. I remembered the African saying, "Blessed be he who gives sleep instead of worries!" and retired into my room for the night's rest. It was a hot and humid night—the closeness of

my room almost suffocated me ; therefore I had my bed brought into the courtyard, to sleep under Allah's open sky. But there came no sleep to my eyes. The whole night through I lay on my back, my hands under my head, gazing at the stars in the naive hope of finding some solution or a guiding idea in them.

CHAPTER XII

GOLD FOR GUNS

I LIVED to see the Oriental sunrise. But after the glory of the sky in the Swiss Alps, on the Hungarian plains, and in Paris from the Sacré Cœur—when the horizon is painted faint crimson long before the sun appears—this Oriental dawn disappointed me. It was like a Walt Disney Silly Symphony in which the sun appears on the sky as if hurled from a catapult. Without warning the gigantic glowing disc came up from behind the gentle sandy hills to the east of Hodeida. It was exactly six o'clock.

The sunrise is Arabia's only institution which runs according to schedule. In this land of eternal tomorrows, where promises are always made but never kept, where appointments are never taken seriously, where punctuality is a sign of weakness—only the sun sticks to its heavenly time-table. All the year round it appears at 6 a.m., shines for exactly twelve hours, and disappears promptly at 6 p.m. Accordingly, the Arab's time begins with the rising of the sun at 6 a.m. and not at midnight. Seven o'clock in the morning is one o'clock to the Arabs; noon is six o'clock; and when "the sun dives into the sea"—as the Yemenites describe their sunset—the beauty of which is more than generous compensation for the sober simplicity of their sunrise—the Arabs say "it is twelve o'clock", and stop bothering about the time. The hours of the night are not numbered.

In the other Oriental lands I visited sunrise marked

the busy beginning of the day. As if some genii had uttered a magic word, the empty streets would become crowded as soon as the sun appeared. But when, at six o'clock, I looked out on Hodeida, I found it empty and deserted. Only the long, dark shadows of the houses interrupted the lifeless monotony of the town. Along the streets, on simple Arab beds, wrapped in linen blankets which they pulled over their heads, slept those unfortunates who had no houses in which to spend the night. But they were by no means the poorest of the poor, for they still had beds and blankets. The next strata in wealthlessness were those who possessed a blanket but no bed; and finally there were many sleeping in the shining white dust of the streets who had neither beds nor blankets, and lay in the nude with only a dirty apron to cover their loins. These dusky pariahs were of the lowest class, the so-called "sweepers", the coolies and the slaves.

Suddenly a solitary wanderer appeared in this dreaming street. His presence in Hodeida surprised me, for now I realized there must be four white men in town. He was a tall, heavily built fellow, with blond hair. His white skin was not tanned; it had become red, like an underdone steak. He was completely covered with freckles. The sun of Arabia had done much damage to this otherwise well-groomed gentleman.

The leisure of his movements showed that not business but merely boredom had driven him from his bed into the deserted streets of Hodeida at this early hour. He strolled along, casting an occasional glance to the right or to the left, swinging his arms in silent wantonness, as people usually do when they suspect no onlookers. He was whistling a marchlike tune, and as he came closer to my house I recognized a well-known German song.

I leaned from my window and greeted him in German: "*Guten Morgen!*" The man started with fright; then from his careless gaiety he stiffened into a military attitude, clicked his heels, bowed slightly, and in a hesitant, mistrusting voice returned my greeting in German:

"*Guten Morgen!*"

Our conversation began clumsily. It was obvious that this steak-faced German was not especially pleased by my unexpected presence in Hodeida; and he was stingy with information. He did tell me, however, that his name was Herman Heinz and that he was a retired captain of the German Army.

"Do you live in Hodeida?" I asked him.

"No. I'm just passing through. I came down a couple of days ago from Sana." He made a special effort to convince me that he was in Hodeida in a purely private capacity, and that there was nothing strange in his being there, and then, as if he had already revealed too many coveted secrets, he took his leave and walked away as fast as he could.

I knew that when a German is in the Near East he is either making gramophone records of native songs or selling arms to native warriors. More often than not these two occupations are combined, the first employed only to conceal the other. I was determined to find out whether Captain Heinz was connected with the gramophone or with the armament trade, so I summoned Ali from his blankets, sent him out into the town to gather more of the Teutonic Captain's secrets. He returned quickly with the complete story: the Captain was the representative of an armament firm. As a matter of fact, there was no need for Captain Heinz to be secretive, for in the Yemen, faithful to ancient Arab tradition, dealing in arms was a free trade. For more than fifty years this part of the world had been the paradise of German, Belgian

and Czechoslovakian armament agents. In Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, as well as in Hodeida in the Yemen, one would always find at least one representative of a European firm and more often a whole army of these travelling salesmen of death.

After King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia tightened the State's control over the sale of armaments, the Yemen became the clearing house of the Oriental armament trade. Most of these European agents now descend on Sawr because they know that Imam Yahya is always a willing buyer, pays fair prices and—most important in the Near East—he pays in hard cash. In the caves of the Yemen, which the arms-loving King has turned into veritable arsenals, immense quantities of arms and ammunition are hoarded and the Imam is still buying more rifles, machine-guns, bullets. . . .

I was told that there were more rifles than inhabitants in the Yemen, and that this strange enthusiasm of the ruler was more than the mere passion of a collector ; in fact, it was a very lucrative business.

One of the main pillars of Britain's colonial policy is to disarm the natives. The arms of the Aden Arabs to the south and of the Hadhramis to the east were taken away or restricted to old-fashioned models for which no ammunition could be found. This British crusade against rifles and bullets was part of Britain's endeavour to put an end to the ancient custom of blood feuds which had made the Arabian Peninsula an eternal bloody battlefield. Tribe was fighting against tribe, family against family, and in this perpetual hostility Britain saw the real obstacle to the Arab's cultural development. The results of the crusade seemed to confirm the British theory. As soon as the natives were disarmed the feuds ceased ; the nomad Arabs settled on the soil and began to cultivate it. Warriors became farmers and, instead of fighting each other, began their struggle with the



HASHISH SMOKER IN ADEN



NATIVE SURGERY

A popular treatment for many ills consists of cutting the skin over the seat of the pain and drawing out the blood with heated cows' horns

soil—instead of ambushing a neighbouring tribe, waiting for the rain. Ibn Saud was also a disciple of this theory; out of his fighting Wahabis he formed the famous brotherhood of the Ickwath, a sacred society of desert farmers. He took their rifles and gave them spades and shovels instead. The Arabian Peninsula began its development; fierce Arabs became peaceful citizens.

On the whole of the Arabian Peninsula the Yemen is the only country where warring is still held higher in esteem than farming; where nothing has changed since Mohammed founded his religion of the Fighting Sword. The agents of European armament firms make profitable use of this unchanged state of affairs. They swarm over the region, coming with huge consignments of arms and leaving with large quantities of gold and silver.

A private in this army of armament agents, Herr Heinz had nothing of the sinister air of the merchant of death about him. He was a German petty bourgeois, to whom representing an armament firm was just as sober and prosaic as representing a firm making safety-pins or tractors. He had none of the glamour of those European warmongers who invade international hotel lobbies and do business in the shade of champagne bottles with the help of ladies of the *demi-monde*. Herr Heinz was a plain, simple, ordinary type of fellow, with the flat phantasy of the Germans, who never rise above the monotonous routine of their business. To tell the truth, I did not find Herr Heinz especially smart.

Later, in Aden, we became something like friends, and the only ambition I could discover in this armament agent was the desire to find a pair of blue silk pyjamas for his wife, who was attending to their simple German household while her husband was selling rifles to the Yemenis. They had three children

and a nice little cottage; and Herr Heinz's hobby was to cultivate roses in his garden when he was not selling machine-guns. His trip to the Yemen was his first large-scale undertaking and not a particularly easy one. His firm had delivered 50,000 rifles to Poland, but the Poles found them faulty and refused the shipment. The rifles were returned to the firm. A check-up revealed that the Poles were right. But instead of destroying the faulty merchandise, the firm was trying to sell them somewhere outside of Europe, and that was why Herr Heinz was in the Yemen.

He was not especially suited for the job, since he was a poor linguist. His interpreter, a young German graduate of the Berlin School of Oriental Languages, had pretended to know Arabic. Not until they arrived in Hodeida did it turn out that what the young German really spoke was anything but Arabic, and so neither of them could make themselves understood. The German interpreter was sent back to Berlin, and in his stead came an Egyptian from Port Said. Together they journeyed to Sana, where Herr Heinz finally succeeded in unloading the faulty rifles at a good price. The Yemenis knew the guns were not quite up to standard, but they did not care. It was enough that they looked like rifles. I could not imagine why His Majesty the Imam was buying faulty rifles, but Ali knew the explanation.

"The Imam is not buying these rifles for himself," he said, "because he has enough, and good ones. As soon as they arrive they will be smuggled over the frontiers to the Aden Hinterland, to the Hadhramauth, to Saudi Arabia; they will even reach Transjordan, Palestine and Syria, and will be resold by the agents of the Imam at exorbitant prices. His Majesty pockets a neat profit on our incurable love for firearms."

There were also some Abyssinians in Hodeida

buying arms from the Imam's agents for the Abyssinian rebels fighting against the Italians. This interstate armament trade of the Yemen was as confusing as the politics of the Near East. While Germans and Italians in Europe were working to make their Rome-Berlin Axis stronger, these weapons of German origin found their way to the Abyssinian insurgents to be used against the Italians. What happened a few months later, when Signor Mussolini sent two ships full of armaments to the Imam as a goodwill offering, was even stranger. These very same Italian arms were also resold to the Ethiopian insurgents, Mussolini thus indirectly arming his most bitter enemies and lengthening the duration of the Ethiopian struggle.

When Heinz made the deal in Sana he was told that payment would follow only on delivery. This was something of a shock to him as he had arrived in the Yemen with only samples and orders to sell and collect and promise delivery. But the Imam had had experience with promised deliveries. Six months before, a certain Mr. Jones had arrived in Hodeida from Ethiopia, where he had tried to sell his stuff to Haile Selassie. The termination of the Italian campaign meant the abrupt end of business in Addis Ababa, so Jones had to find a new customer. The Imam bought up all he had to offer. As soon as the deal was closed Jones was given a cheque on an English bank, and left the Yemen with the promise to deliver immediately on his return to Germany.

Months passed by, but no weapons came. The Imam grew impatient and sent a letter to Jones's firm near Stettin. His letter caused an inquiry in Germany, and the century's biggest fraud was uncovered. It turned out that the arms were loaded in a German steamer with orders to proceed to the Yemen. But while on the high seas the captain of

the boat was instructed to discharge his cargo in a Spanish Loyalist port instead. Jones was a member of an underground Communist organization in Germany, and succeeded in procuring export permits to the Yemen, after which he delivered the arms to the Loyalists instead. When this amazing trick was discovered the German secret police searched for him, but he escaped to Czechoslovakia. A few of his co-conspirators were caught in southern Germany, tried by the Berlin People's Court and sentenced to death.

The Imam was the financial victim of this fantastic adventure, and as a result his mistrust and hatred towards Europeans increased. Now he would pay only on delivery. So Herr Heinz cabled his firm, the rifles were loaded on a Hansa steamer and sent down to Hodeida. Two days before I met him he had been advised that the steamer was approaching Hodeida, and on receipt of the good news Heinz and the Imam's "Board of Munitions" came down from Sana to meet the rifles. Shortly after, the German boat, with 50,000 rifles aboard, dropped anchor in the harbour. In town everything was prepared for a fitting reception. The members of the "Board" were assembled in the house of an Arab nobleman, to which the money was taken from the city's treasury in a long and ceremonious procession. At the head of the parade marched a company of the Imam's soldiers, followed by a hundred pitch-black negro slaves, each one of them carrying on his head a box containing gold sovereigns or silver dollars. Behind them walked the Vizier and his staff, escorted by another company of soldiers.

Down in the harbour swift dhows waited in readiness to bring the rifles ashore. When the first dhow-load of rifles arrived in the courtyard of the house they were counted, the price calculated, and the

exact amount paid over to Herr Heinz. So it went the whole day long: dhows brought the rifles to Hodeida and on their return journey carried the boxes of gold and silver to the steamer. It was amazing and amusing to watch the Arabs count the rifles and Herr Heinz count the money. On the last dhow sailing out, Herr Heinz left Hodeida, accompanied by his Egyptian interpreter and five boxes full of gold. The whole scene was true to the Yemen's sacred tradition—a typically Arabian event which could not happen anywhere else.

Watching the exchange of rifles for gold was the whole crew of my "prison". When Ali finally returned to my house he told me that Herr Heinz's protest against the presence of "an English journalist" at the culmination of his deal was partly responsible for my imprisonment. The oil prospectors, who wanted to keep their mission a deep secret and feared disclosures because of my unexpected visit, were also against me. So I had a formidable alliance of enemies to combat. It seemed hopeless, and I prepared to retreat. It was only because of the rifles that I was still tolerated in the Yemen. His Excellency the Governor had simply no time left to devote to my affair. It was after sunset before he returned to his palace, and so I had to stay on another night—since no true Arab attends to official business after sundown. Ali—who had spent the day in the town mingling with all kinds of people—returned with discouraging news.

"Your fate," he said, "rests with the Imam. The Vizier has sent a long telegram to Sana, informing His Majesty of your arrival, and telling him all the contradictory rumours that are current in the town. Now he awaits instructions from Sana."

Just like Mr. D.'s gramophone, I myself became an affair of the Yemeni State. To oil the wheels of

diplomacy I filed two telegrams myself, one to Ragheb Bey, the Imam's Minister of State, in which I tried to explain my motives and to counteract the Vizier's naive and biased information; the second to a Dr. P. W. R. Petrie, head of the South Arabia Mission Council of the Church of Scotland, an Aden eye specialist, who had recently been invited by the Imam to establish a hospital in Sana. I asked the Scottish doctor to intervene on my behalf.

The officials in the Hodeida post-office are not bound by secrecy, and soon all Hodeida knew of my two telegrams and of their contents. They were doubtful as to their possible success. Saheb Saleh paid me a visit to warn me not to be very optimistic about Dr. Petrie's intervention. "Who is this Hakin?" he asked, and gave the answer: "An Ingliz! And what are the Ingliz in Al Yaman? Foreigners! Dr. Petrie is not the adviser of the Imam but his servant, and even if he were one of his advisers the Imam makes his decision without consulting them. There is but one will in Al Yaman—the will of the Imam. His will is formed by no counsellors, neither Arab nor foreign, but solely by himself. If your presence in Al Yaman should please him, you may stay. But should it displease him—you will have to go. I fear it will displease him!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE WILL OF AL YAMAN

I WAS thus made to realize that if Louis XIV's statement, "*L'état c'est moi*" is still the guiding political axiom of any contemporary State, it certainly is that of the Yemen. The will on which my immediate future depended, the will of Imam Yahya, King of the Yemen, is strong, irrevocable and incorruptible. It is both the constitution and the law of the Yemen.

The Yemeni dictatorship and its totalitarianism is no modern product. It was established one thousand years ago, when Sayed Yahya ur-Rassi, founder of the Imamic dynasty, came down from Iraq as a missionary of the Zaidis. This sect was called Zaid after the great-grandson of the fourth Caliph Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed. Because the present Imam, Yahya ibn Hamid'ud Din, is a direct descendant of the Prophet, his secular rule has a spiritual foundation; he is not only the political head of the State, but also his country's highest priest.

According to Bertram Thomas, "Zaidism is a theocratic form of government in which rule can only vest in the seed of the Prophet. The field thus circumscribed, the theory allowed democratic election: the practice brought a hereditary religious office with a tradition of personal sanctity."

Before the present Yahya was accepted as the new Imam on the death of his father he had to meet fourteen requirements: he had to be male, free-born,

taxpayer, sound in mind, sound in all his senses, sound in "his ends", which means having perfect feet and hands, just, pious, generous, of administrative ability, descendant of Ali, not of the Ismaili sect, brave, and able to interpret the Koran. Despite these severe standards there were several qualified contenders, and it took Yahya more than twenty years to establish himself securely on the throne of Yahya ur-Rassi. But today he is—according to the unanimous opinion of his three million subjects—uncontested King of the Yemen, "a sparrow sitting alone on the house-top".

Imam Yahya is now an old man, somewhere between sixty and seventy; not even he himself knows his exact age. When the present generation of his subjects was born he was already an old man, outliving the average age of his fellow Arabs, and since the vigour of his mind increases with the years his subjects not only respect him but even fear him with superstitious awe. They say: "Our Imam is superhuman. He will go on living for ever!"

When he does die, however, there will be serious trouble. He has too many sons for a peaceful succession. Already he has gaoled a few because of their quarrels. There are many Zaidis outside his immediate family who believe they can measure up to the "fourteen requirements", and are already mustering their forces to strike. The British, the Italians, and Ibn Saud are all waiting to step in when trouble starts.

But for the time being Imam Yahya is very much alive, and neither his body nor his mind betrays his venerable age. All who know him agree he is the cleverest monarch in all Arabia. He has won many battles, none by force, all by ingenious ruses.

Although he is conscious of his strength he is clever enough not to exhibit it. When a Syrian traveller

asked him, "How many of the three million inhabitants of your country do you govern?" he replied with a modest smile: "A small number, very small!" The courtiers around him were embarrassed when the question was put, but welcoming the opportunity for adulation, protested:

"Every one of the three million obeys the Imam!"

"No, no," His Majesty objected, and holding out his hand with fingers close to the palm, insisted, "Just a handful!"

His modesty is the civilized gesture of the wise man. His mind is avid for news from every corner of the earth. He subscribes to all Arab newspapers, even those published in America. He corresponds with Arabs dwelling all over the world, and receives detailed reports on every event. He is familiar with the difficulties in which President Roosevelt finds himself; he knows the roots of the Anglo-Italian controversies; Hitler's power; Japan's aspirations; and the dangers behind the Spanish Civil War. Moreover, he receives cuttings of every line printed in European and American papers about his country. I was amazed to learn that the Imam had read every single article written by the English newspaper correspondent, Patrick Balfour, who was permitted to spend a few days in Hodeida. Just like all the other dictators, His Majesty, too, hates being criticized; and since Balfour's articles were anything but flattering he now bans foreign newspaper correspondents from his country.

He likes to know both sides of controversies outside his own country. A few weeks before I came to Hodeida he invited a wealthy Jewish merchant of Aden to come to Sana. His Majesty was interested in the Palestinian troubles. When the Aden Jew arrived in Sana the Imam said, "My information comes from Egyptian newspapers and from Palestinian

Arabs. These reports give me the Arabs' point of view. I wanted you to come because I want to learn the cause of the Jews. You see," he added, "there are several thousand Jews living in my country, and I have to be just towards them. But how can I remain just when I am incited by reports which tell of suppression of Palestinian Arabs by Palestinian Jews?" To spare him embarrassment and to enable him to speak out, the Imam received the Jew in private audience.

The Jew presented the cause of his race.

His Majesty thanked him: "Now that I have heard both sides, I am nearer the absolute truth." As a result of this audience he saw to it that the many horror-stories circulating about events in Palestine were kept from his subjects. As editor-in-chief of *Al Imam*, his own newspaper, which is published at irregular intervals in Sana, he counteracted the rumours and often advocated the cause of the Jews. While in Iraq, in Transjordan, in Syria, and even in Egypt, Jew-baiting was the result of the spreading of these unfounded rumours, the Yemen failed to punish its 60,000 Jews for the alleged sufferings of the Palestinian Arabs.

Yet his hatred towards "infidels" is deeply rooted. In religious matters he scorns diplomacy and makes blasphemous remarks about Christ, often shocking his Christian visitors. Yet the statesman he most admires is a Christian—George Washington. He knows everything about the first President, and frequently quotes what Washington said when he refused the Presidency a third time: "We did not free ourselves from the rule of kings to set up a monarchy in America." "In time of peace prepare for war" is another favourite Washingtonian maxim with the Imam. In the first he admires the characteristic qualities of the man, and in the other its application to Yemeni conditions.

Not only is he an able politician and a brave warrior, but he is a savant and a poet as well. His library is said to be the richest in Arabia, containing priceless manuscripts, the books of Al Baidhawi, Lallalo'ddin, Al Zamakhshari, and the other famous commentators on the Koran, all the Arabian classics, and even contemporary authors. It is his sanctuary, and no one is permitted to enter. When he tires of State or family affairs he retreats to its seclusion to compose a poem as a hobby. He is considered a good poet even by high Arabic standards; his verses are widely read and much admired.

In affairs of State, however, he is a realistic politician who enjoys the effort of solving difficult problems. His government is a one-man concern, and although he maintains a cabinet (at the time of my stay the Grand Qadi Abdullah ibn Hussein al-Amni was his Prime Minister), his ministers have not even the right of offering advice. He and the head of his Private Secretariat, Qadi Abd-al-Karim ibn Ahmed Mutachar, manage everything.

He is also master of the judiciary system. Justice in the Yemen is taken from the cruel instructions of the Koran, such as: "If a man or woman steal, cut off their hands, in retribution for that which they have committed." Or, "They should give life for life, and eye for eye, and nose for nose, and ear for ear, and tooth for tooth; and that wounds should also be punished by retaliation." All these savage punishments are perfectly acceptable to the Moslem's mind because Mohammed declared: "This is an exemplary punishment appointed by God; and God is mighty and wise." Every day Imam Yahya sits in the shade of "the Tree of Justice" in Sana to administer the civil and criminal laws of the Koran. There is no appeal from his decisions, and his sentences are considered wise and just. I saw many

thieves, hands chopped off, lying helplessly in the hot sand of the desert, abandoned by all decent citizens to a slow and painful death.

Imam Yahya works twelve full hours a day. He finds time to receive in audience provincial governors and a few common petitioners, but he dislikes personal calls. The petition writers of the Yemen belong to the country's most prosperous profession. Hundreds of thousands of petitions reach the Imam's palace yearly, and not a single one escapes his attention. He glances through every one of these letters and writes his verdict in red ink. Nobody but the Imam is permitted the use of red ink, and his delicate fingers are always besmirched with red stains. I was shown my own application, with the Imam's red refusal on it. It had never been returned to me because his Foreign Minister, Ragheb Bey, a former Turkish officer, considered the terseness of these refusals impolite towards Europeans. Instead, he wrote a letter himself, in French, with exaggerated courtesy, in the green ink reserved for *his* personal use.

Yahya is also the custodian of his own immense fortune, the size of which is a closely guarded secret. His hoarding is his only violation of the commandments of the Koran, which provides ingenious punishment for greed. On the day of judgment the treasures of the avaricious will be heated in the fire of hell, and their sides, backs and foreheads will be branded with them. Nevertheless, Imam Yahya's treasury is full to overflowing in caves the whereabouts of which are known only to him. It is sheer love of gold that actuates him, for he deplores pomp and splendour and lives a frugal life. The origin of this fortune is somewhat doubtful, and far from being the result of honest trading. The bulk of it comes from his subjects, who are taxed beyond their capacity. The Imam's revenue system is to be blamed for his being

hated all over his country, although his wisdom and justice are respected and admired.

There are no government officials other than tax-collectors. They must deliver a certain amount in money and goods, no matter how and where they collect it. The chief grievance of the people is that not all of the taxes collected reach the Imam's treasury ; a part is kept by the ruthless tax-collector. An old Yemenite peasant who was farming in the vicinity of Taiz near the Aden frontier told me his sad story :

"The tax-collector comes into our village," he complained, "and asks about the crops. We tell him it was a poor harvest, but our hearts harbour no scorn towards Allah because we know He was right in punishing us ; but the tax-collector does not believe our lamentations. He taxes us according to his whim and takes it, often by force. Half of it he sends to Sana, but the other half he keeps for himself." Everywhere I went there were complaints against the heavy taxation which kept the people of the Yemen poverty-stricken but made their king the richest man on the Arabian Peninsula.

Out of this money His Majesty maintains his standing army of 5,000 soldiers and imports arms for his concealed arsenals. The man closest to his pocket-book is a Jew named Joseph Soberi, his fiscal agent and confidant. Soberi was born in the ghetto of Sana at a time when the Jews were not permitted beyond the limits of the ghetto ; but Imam Yahya was a liberal monarch and gave his Jews rights which no other Imam before him did. In fact, in a land of the most vigorous Jew-baiting (I cannot possibly call it anti-Semitism, the Arabs themselves being Semites) he is a friend and admirer of the Jews.

Soberi belongs to the King's closest entourage, has an entrée to the palace, and is one of the Imam's most trusted advisers. Many say that Soberi knows even

the exact location of the hidden treasures. I met him in Aden. He wore immaculate European clothes and his manners were perfectly civilized. He frequently visited those European countries which trade in armaments ; he had been to Belgium, Czechoslovakia, England, France, and even Germany during the Hitler regime. When I met him he was *en route* for Belgium to close a deal with the Fabrique Nationale, famous manufacturers of arms. Although he knew all the secrets of his Arab master he would not speak about them. He had nothing but praise for the Imam, sincere devotion and fearless respect. Above all, he was an honest man. These were the qualities, rare in Arabia, which made him the Imam's general agent. His master frequently said : "Soberi is the only man who has never tried to cheat me !"

Imam Yahya trusts no one, not even members of his own family. His four wives have borne him thirty-four children, of whom eighteen are still living. He has thirteen sons and five married daughters. His favourite son, Saif ul-Islam Mohammed, perished in the Red Sea, and he is constantly at loggerheads with the remaining thirteen. They are very different from him, pious and troublesome, shrewd and ignorant. Two of his sons are aspirants for the succession : Saif ul-Islam Hussein and Saif ul-Islam Qasim. In Hodeida I met Hussein, who was returning from his annual pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. Although Yahya and Ibn Saud are enemies, the Imam still sends members of his family to Saudi Arabia to visit the Holy Cities. Once a royal pilgrimage almost ended in a war. Members of the Imam's family sailed for Jeddah on the steamer *Asia*. A fire broke out on the boat. The Imam's family was rescued—but the King regarded the fire as a hostile act of the Wahabis and demanded an explanation. It took all the diplomatic skill of the Red Sea's British peacemakers to avoid

war between the two countries. In spite of this experience, the Imam's family continues its yearly pilgrimage.

Hussein is the most pious of the Imam's sons, and meditates over the passages of the Koran day and night. He is a slender and fragile Arab with sharp-cut features and dreamy black eyes. In Hodeida he was taciturn to muteness. A few weeks later, at the Coronation of King George in London, he turned out to be a shrewd diplomat and an able attorney for his father. He was fêted and flattered. With true Arab philosophy he smiled his acknowledgment of the British courtship, but said nothing that would commit him or his father. When in January 1938 the Arabic programmes of the British Broadcasting Corporation were ceremoniously inaugurated, Prince Hussein was asked to say a few words. He accepted the invitation and began his speech with empty courtesies, but wound up with a very firm and undiplomatic statement: "From the depth of my heart," he said, "I desire that the friendly understanding between Great Britain and the Arab people be particularly evident in regard to the South of the Yemen and Palestine." What he called the South of the Yemen is Aden to the British.

Should it come to a showdown on the death of his father, Hussein has only one really formidable opponent—his brother, Prince Qasim. Qasim is a man of the sword, commander of his father's forces, a wild and restless warrior. What he lacks is the wisdom and piety of the old Imam; he could establish his regime only by the force of his warriors. This would mean the end of the Yemen's independence—since, even if Britain and Italy were to refrain from interfering in a civil war in the Yemen, Ibn Saud would certainly take advantage of the opportunity to annex Arabia's last independent kingdom.

All the sons of the Imam are men in their forties, but the old man treats them like children. If they are unruly they are even slapped. Three are kept in gaol : one because he was fond of alcohol, another because he lacked piety, the third because he was a rowdy. They shared the prison, or rather concentration camp, with the best sons of the unruly chiefs, held as hostages to keep the fathers in check. His own sons as well as those of the hostile tribal chiefs had to bend to the inflexible will of Al Yaman ; and now my fate, too, was dependent upon it. Knowing this uncompromising will, which never wavered from its initial decision, I was prepared for the worst.

CHAPTER XIV

BETWEEN TWO WARS

(1) *Rebellion in the Wadi Doan*

THE following day brought the end of my idyllic existence. About eight o'clock in the morning Achmed, the Harbour Master, burst into the house to tell me His Excellency the Governor wanted to see me. I gave up hope. When, those two days ago, I arrived at Hodeida I considered myself far superior to these uncivilized natives and was full of the self-confidence of the European when travelling in lands populated by natives. The two days in solitary confinement worked hard on my nerves, and I was quickly losing all my superiority, which was about to turn into a raging inferiority complex. Nobody can keep himself above the condescension of the Yemeni Arabs, and I had to travel to the Yemen only to find out that after all the white man is still not the undoubted king of the Universe. In the Yemen we are not the emissaries of our much-praised European civilization, but intruders, infidels, dogs.

I was escorted to the Vizier's palace by Achmed and two policemen. It was a large white building at the north end of the town. In the courtyard slaves and petitioners were loafing. His Excellency was waiting in the great reception-hall. Even the dirt and dust could not hide the beauty of the Persian carpets which covered the floors of the huge room. Along the walls

guests of the Governor sat on soft cushions, their legs pulled in under their bodies. When my procession entered there was a murmur of "salaam", and the Vizier stood up to greet me with a cordial handshake. He was a thin gentleman with a noble and kind face. The warmth of his eyes told me that had the decision been his I could have stayed in Hodeida as long as I wished. But he was here merely to execute the Imam's commands; I could expect nothing good from this early audience.

Had I come a few years earlier I would not have been banished. At that time Prince Achmed, the Imam's eldest son, an enlightened and kind young man, was Viceroy of Hodeida. He had none of his father's blind hatred towards foreigners, and not only tolerated visiting Europeans, but even induced them to stay longer. During his reign Hodeida was the metropolis of the Red Sea, a modern metropolis. He was an enthusiastic admirer of all sports, and during his regime there was even a football match, an event of which the Arabs still speak with awe and enthusiasm. His love for sports was responsible for his early death. He organized a swimming contest, and when one of the competitors was overcome by a sudden cramp the Prince himself dived to his rescue. He was caught in the swift currents of the Red Sea and drowned. His body was never recovered. This tragedy was considered a divine warning, and all sports and infidels were banned for ever. Today Hodeida is once more a fast stronghold of the Koran.

His Excellency the Vizier was determined to make my expulsion from the Yemen as pleasant as possible. I was seated on one of the cushions in front of the Governor's throne-like divan. Soon slaves brought tea—in this land of world-renowned Mocha coffee. *Nargilehs* were placed in front of us, and I had the honour of sharing one with His Excellency. Later,

what was distributed, and we all chewed for a while in silent expectation.

Suddenly the Governor turned to Ali: "Your master arrived here in the guise of a fur merchant, thus misleading our King, Commander of the Faithful. But nothing can remain concealed from this Wise Solver of difficult riddles, for Allah graciously enlightened him. Our friends in Aden have informed us as to the real intentions of your master. He is no fur merchant, but a treasure-hunter searching for the hidden treasures of the Queen of Sheba; we were also told that he wants to find oil in Yemen's soil; and finally we received word that he is a British agent in search of landing-fields for Ingliz aeroplanes. Whatever he is, he is no fur merchant, and not honest in his intentions." He stopped to allow Ali to translate his speech. But Ali cut it short; he simply said: "He wants to kick you out!" Taking a deep puff from the *nârgileh*, His Excellency continued:

"Tell your master that we are greatly honoured by his visit to Hodeida, and feel small and insignificant in his presence. We would be genuinely happy if we could persuade him to extend his stay with us. But Allah, the Merciful and Compassionate, and his earthly representative, our King, descendant of the Prophet, have decided otherwise." Then suddenly changing his pious chanting to a tone of firm command, he concluded: "Inform your master that we have been ordered to ask him to return to his boat and leave the Yemen at once."

Ali tried to bargain. He told the Vizier I was no treasure-hunter, no oil prospector, and no British agent. He even went so far as to tell him the truth about me being a writer of books. But the Imam's command was irrevocable: I had to leave Hodeida at once.

Disheartened, I left the Palace of the Governor. I

looked out over the harbour; it was empty, there was no steamer in the anchorage. I could stay another day! But boat or no boat made no difference to Achmed and the Harbour Master and the policeman. Straight to the quay, and on to a dhow, they marched me. My luggage had already been piled on. As soon as I was aboard, the dhow set sail and we moved out to the open sea, there to await the arrival of a steamer bound for Aden.

Putting me on a dhow and sending it out to the open sea seemed like a sort of mediæval punishment, and although it was far less comfortable than my "prison" in town I enjoyed it immensely. The Arabs in the boat did not know how long they would have to keep me on board, but somebody said there was another Cowasjee Dinshaw steamer due at Hodeida very soon. When, he did not know. Tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, next week, it did not seem to matter. The Arabs assured me they would send water and fresh bread to my dhow until the boat would arrive.

My thrilling dhow experience was soon over. At midnight the S.S. *Ayamonte* came steaming from the north, her electric lights cutting a narrow slice out of the black darkness. In the bottomless depth of the tropical night the lighted ship was an uncanny ghost. Soon after she dropped anchor a faint light flickered where Hodeida had melted into the night. The regularity of the flashes made it obvious that these were signals from the shore, communicating with the bridge of the *Ayamonte*. Ali, who had been employed on one of these Red Sea steamers as clerk, understood the language of the light and knew that Sahib Saleh was telling our story to the skipper. Suddenly this romantic conversation stopped, and the searchlight of the ship swept the water like an over-sized, glaring broom: to the north, to the east, and then the light

came south—it found our dhow and embraced us in a cold, glaring circle. A lifeboat was lowered and came rowing towards us.

Half an hour later I was on the bridge of the *Ayamonte* with the captain, drinking my first whisky after three days of enforced teetotalling.

I dreaded the return to Aden. My banishment from the Yemen was a humiliating experience, and already I was scheming other ways of trying again, even if I had to be smuggled across its closely guarded frontiers. But expulsion from the Yemen was nothing unusual to Aden people; they were used to having visitors to the Yemen thrown back at them like human boomerangs. They deplored the Imam's hatred towards foreigners and disapproved his sealing of the borders. In fact, as soon as I confided to my friends that I wanted to try again, everyone was ready with a suggestion. A Hungarian doctor, an old and cherished acquaintance, whom I first met in Harar, Ethiopia, and who had moved to Aden after the Italian occupation, suggested that I hire a gang of smugglers to slip across the frontier at night. Five years ago I could have bribed my way through the Yemeni provinces, enjoying the help of His Majesty's mutinous subjects, who took a special delight in defying their master. But since then the Imam has succeeded in consolidating his rule over the whole territory of the Yemen.

The Aden Government was very obliging and broke all precedent in my case. His Excellency the Governor, Sir Bernard Reilly, sent a telegram to the Imam urging him to permit my return to the Yemen. It was a personal message from the representative of the King of England to a fellow-ruler, and since it had never before been done it did not seem likely that the Imam would refuse his request. But diplomatic considerations seem to have no place in the political

dictionary of the Yemeni ruler. His reply came a few days later :

HIS MAJESTY THE KING OF THE YEMEN

TO

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR OF ADEN

We have received your telegram and hasten to answer to it since we feel honoured to comply with your wishes and to grant your requests.

It is with the greatest regret that we inform you that at present there is no war going on in the Yemen which would interest the foreign journalist mentioned in your telegram and necessitate his presence.

We will deem it our duty to inform you as soon as the peace of the Yemen will be upset, so that the foreign journalist can proceed in time to gather his information and write his report.

We remain with the expression of our greatest esteem.

A copy of the Imam's telegram was sent to me by Colonel Lake, who wrote : "I am sorry, but His Majesty's telegram is tantamount to a final refusal. . . ." But I refused to give up.

News reaching Aden from the Hadhramauth during the next few days, however, made me consider a change of plan. The news was alarming, and was at first denied by the Residency. But when eyewitnesses arrived the Political Secretary admitted that there was trouble brewing in the hinterland of Mukalla. The Hadhramauth is the south-eastern part of the huge British protectorate with a status not quite clarified. Though there were "treaties of friendship" with the Qatiri and Qaiti Sultans, recognized rulers of the two largest Hadhrami provinces, the lesser tribes would not

accept the protection of His Majesty's Government, and were a perpetual headache to the political department.

These tribes were constantly fighting each other. Peaceful life in the villages, commerce and trading were impossible. These warring Bedouins ambushed and robbed caravans *en route* from the ports of Muscat and Mukalla to the Yemen, over the unbroken, heroic Hadhrami country, across mighty canyons and steep mountains, through the uninhabited, merciless Rub-al-Qali, the Desert of Flame. Britain had no armed force, not even a single representative, in this huge territory, ruled by two kings and countless pretenders! There were chiefs of various Hadhrami tribes and members of the immensely wealthy and influential Al Kaif merchant family, who had returned to their country castles in the Hadhrami hinterland after having made fortunes trading in the Dutch East Indies and in Singapore. The army of His Highness the Sultan of Mukalla was unsuccessful in curbing the raids of the Bedouins. Fellahin coming to Aden reported they were forced to dig deep trenches around their villages and sleep with rifles at their sides to protect themselves and their livestock.

These isolated desert hold-ups were being flamed into a general rebellion by Italian machinations. Using natives as political agents, they spread rumours of British brutality in other Arabian countries, particularly in Palestine, and thus succeeded in exciting the war-loving tribes of the hinterland. The chief weapon in the arsenal of these hirelings was the story that England was about to cede the Hadhramauth to King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia. There was nothing on earth the Hadhramis dreaded more than a Saudian rule. They still remembered the slaughter and massacre of the people of the Hejaz when the Wahabi hordes of Ibn Saud invaded their country.

As if to confirm the Italian-made rumours of British intention, St. John Philby suddenly appeared in the Hadhramauth. Today Philby is the mystery man of the Arabian Peninsula. Some twenty-five years ago he was a British officer and a member of the Indian Bureau's political staff, which had jurisdiction over Ibn Saud, the then rising rebel of Nej. In 1917 Philby was sent to the Reyrdh court of this unknown desert as political adviser. He soon became a sincere admirer of his new master and a firm believer in the cause of the Wahabis. Later he became a Mohammedan.

Geographical societies appreciate his explorations of the immense unmapped Rub-al-Qali desert. A high Saudian dignitary said to me: "He is a mystery man . . . a secret man." I told him I was convinced that Philby was sincere in his beliefs, but he remained sceptical: "You see," he said, "Philby is called Abdullah in Saudia, and John in England; he is a Moslem with us, but a Christian by birth. Do you think that a man can have two names and two faiths?" No amount of persuasion would convince him that a man could become a sincere convert to a different religion.

It may be that St. John Philby is really a victim of Britain's fumbling policy in the Near East. It is the tragedy of British politics on the Arabian Peninsula that Britons stationed in Arabia during and after the War could not agree on the person most deserving of Britain's protection and friendship. Lawrence favoured Hussein, King of the Hejaz, and succeeded in getting the full patronage of Downing Street for him. Colonel Jacob, former Political Secretary of Aden, advocated Imam Yahya, with no success at all. The late Sir Percy Cox, the greatest authority on this part of the world, and Philby, selected Ibn Saud as their man, and events proved these two men right. Hussein's power was crushed

by the ignored Ibn Saud, who today rules over large territories previously held by Lawrence's puppets. Ibn Saud will never forget that in his struggle against Hussein the complete machinery of Britain's official Near East diplomacy was on Hussein's side and against him. Therefore, even though he maintains friendly relations with Britain, his grievance is not remedied by the concessions and privileges showered on him after Lawrence's pet, Hussein, disappeared from the Arabian scene. Those who see what has become of Lawrence's "revolt in the desert" realize that his politics lacked the seven pillars of wisdom. He was a young enthusiast with somewhat amateurish political aims, a dreamer who went astray in the spiritual labyrinth of the desert and was never able to find his way out. From a literary point of view he is a great man; but he is a great man only as a writer. As a politician and as a diplomat he failed. Spending millions in gold cultivating a friendship with Hussein, who was so weak that he was unable to make an impressive stand, even with Britain's protection behind him, was a mistake for which the British Empire is still paying heavily.

His most formidable opponent, Philby, was too far away from the centre of the political game when Lawrence made his moves on the chess-board. He was shouting from the middle of the sandy desert, and his voice coming via India could not be heard in Cairo or in London. Perhaps his failure to influence the British on Ibn Saud's behalf made him renounce his faith and become a fanatical adherent of Ibn Saud's cause. His is a tragic fate of which he is probably not even aware.

Philby's advice to Ibn Saud always urged a firm stand against the gentle political efforts of Britain's Minister in Jeddah, whose orders were to play the same kind of game that the American Ambassadors play in

Mexico City and Havana. Today the independence of Ibn Saud is well established, with Britain degraded to the status of a "friendly foreign power" in territories where she was once paramount. I have always been greatly impressed by those Englishmen whose humanity conquered their nationalism, and who develop a fanatical belief in the justice of a sacred cause.

In the past few years Philby has been busy protesting against what he terms English penetration in Arabia. In letters written to papers like the *Journals* of the Royal Central Asian Society and of Great Britain and the Near East, in lectures delivered to distinguished English audiences, in conversations in English political drawing-rooms and in the lobby of the Athenæum Club he was untiring in trying to convince his fellow-Britishers to keep out of Arabia and to leave the Arabs alone. His letters were emphatic when he spoke of the Arabs' cause in Palestine and when he protested against a recent flying expedition of the Royal Air Force over the mysterious country of Sheba. The official British explanation was that the flight was scientific in character, and that the aerial photography had been done in the interest of geographical knowledge. But Philby firmly believed the English had sent the expedition for military reasons.

This fight between Philby and the official British policy was still raging when the first reports of unrest in the Hadhramauth were sounded. Then Philby turned up in the canyons of the Wadi Doan and the Wadi Hadhramauth, where the unrest was most dangerous. The presence of Abdullah Philby among the discontented Bedouins was used by Italy's agents to confirm their information. "Philby," they said, "is Ibn Saud's agent. Why should he come to the Hadhramauth at a time when people talk about Ibn Saud annexing your country if not to prepare this annexation?"

His presence was oil on the already flaming fire, and the British administration had to step in. There were rumours in Aden that Philby had been advised to quit the Hadhramauth at once; no doubt an order wrapped in the customary cellophane of British political politeness. It was impossible to obtain either confirmation or denial of these rumours; nobody wanted to admit that such radical action was necessary. At the same time *The Times* of London published a series of Philby's articles describing this journey, and *The Times* reflecting the Foreign Office's views it appeared as if there were no rift between the Foreign Office and Philby.

The activity of the Italian agents combined with Philby's journey of exploration to the Hadhramauth brought the smouldering rebellion to its boiling-point. I learned that the Residency had decided on action against the rebels before their insurgency resulted in a general uprising. My friends in the political secretariat advised me to postpone my "return journey" to unfriendly Yemen and to await Hadhrami developments in Aden. And when the next day I received word that a squadron of Royal Air Force bombers, fully laden with their deadly cargo, had left for the Hadhramauth, I too made preparations to go east instead of west.

(2) *Sayed Ingram, Sultan Extraordinary*

In the waiting-room of Colonel Lake's office, where I went for a permit to travel to Mukalla in the Hadhramauth, I found two gentlemen with similar intentions. One was a famed French archaeologist, an impressive-looking globe-trotter in whose life nothing was constant, neither country nor profession

nor address. And also my old friend Emmanuel, whom I seemed to be meeting wherever I would go : in Addis Ababa, in Khartoum, in Cairo, and now here in Aden.

Emmanuel, a Rumanian by birth, is a true son of this strange Levantine world. He is what I would call a real commercial adventurer. He will trade in anything the countries between the Sudan and India may produce or need. Besides, he is a surveyor, an anthropologist, and a very good one at that. The only thing he lacked was a clever Yankee press-agent to publicize his many important discoveries for which other people got the credit. Emmanuel had, years ago, set out to explore the savage Danakil desert in Eastern Ethiopia, a land inhabited by cannibals whose chief passion is to mutilate every stranger falling into their hands. Emmanuel spent a long time with the Danakils and returned to Addis Ababa un mutilated ; on the contrary, he had become the friend of the Danakil people.

Shortly after, Emmanuel left Ethiopia and went to live again in Salonica. But when the clouds of war began gathering in the Ethiopian sky, this globe-trotting merchant again turned up in Addis Ababa. He arrived laden with priceless Persian carpets for Haile Selassie, a gift to smooth the way towards profitable concessions in Ethiopia. But since feeling was already running high against the whites, Emmanuel was regarded with suspicion. He insisted he was an enemy of the Italian regime, and even related how he had been imprisoned for some offence in Italy. Shortly before the war broke out Emmanuel again hurriedly left Addis Ababa, but instead of travelling the usual fast rail and ship route via Jibuti to Port Sudan, he went north by caravan through an unfamiliar, hazardous country. *En route* he became a surveyor again and made notes of the water wells, of mountain slopes, of

caravan tracks, and, in fact, mapped the whole uncharted country.

I met him next during the war, this time in Kassala, on the Eritrean border. It seemed very strange that this man, who had sworn he was an enemy of the Fascisti, would venture so close to his persecutors. And what was my astonishment when I learned he had actually crossed the Italian border for a conference with Marshal de Bono's representatives! So this was the secret behind Emmanuel's daring travels! The Italian advance on Ethiopia began with a battle at Mussa Ali, on the Danakil frontier, and continued through the unexplored Danakil desert. The Italians seemed perfectly at home in this *terra incognita*! A few weeks later there was a second advance, over the caravan track which Emmanuel had but recently travelled on his northward trek from Addis Ababa. Was Emmanuel really a commercial adventurer or was he a pseudo-merchant exploring prospective battlefields for his Italian employers?

But this clever fellow knew well how to evade suspicion, and succeeded in remaining in the English Sudan while the Anglo-Italian controversies were at their height. He even complained to me about his difficult position: "Imagine, the English accuse me of being an Italian spy," he said, "and the Italians say I am an English spy—and I really am nothing but a timber merchant. . . ."

And now, on the eve of an anti-British revolt in the Hadhramauth, this timber merchant suddenly appeared in Aden, preparing a trip to the battleground. If I still doubted the truth of the rumours of Italian activities in the Hadhramauth, Emmanuel's presence in the waiting-room of Colonel Lake convinced me. Colonel Lake, to keep Emmanuel and his friends out of the Hadhramauth, closed the frontiers altogether.

I accepted Colonel Lake's ruling and remained in Aden, but Emmanuel refused to give up, and left for Karachi. From there, I was told, he tried to sail to Muscat in Oman, and thence to enter the forbidden land. As soon as Emmanuel left, the Hadhrami frontiers were reopened, and I was officially informed that the rebellion had been crushed. The British bombers returned to their base in Aden, and the private 'plane of Monsieur Bess, a rich Aden merchant, brought Mr. Ingram back from Mukalla.

I went to the Residency to meet him. He is one of Britain's most able "Empire builders", a member of that corps of unknown soldiers who establish and consolidate British spheres of interest throughout the world.

Ingram was spending a few days in Aden before returning to Mukalla to become the first British resident to administer law and order in that country of previous lawlessness. He said: "Already I feel like a stranger in this office, the closeness of the four walls suffocates me." He invited me to a place where he was more at ease: to the college where the sons of the many Aden sultans, sheikhs and chiefs are educated.

In the school some forty prospective sultans were being prepared for their careers as rulers, and even more than that: educated and trained so that they would eventually become real rulers. Arab tradition does not recognize fixed succession to the throne. The thirty-two rulers of the protectorate are all Moslems, and according to the Koran the throne belongs to him who proves to be the strongest and the ablest. Theirs is the religion of the sword and the book; its kings must defend the book with the sword. Thus any member of a late sultan's family and even men outside the family have equal rights when the question of succession comes up. Unfortunately for the British political administration, the

ruling monarchs of the protectorate have too many male relatives. In a book kept in the Residency every single male relative of the rulers is listed. One finds items like :

His Highness Sultan Sir Abdul Kerim bin Fadhl bin Ali, K.C.M.G., K.C.I.E., the Abdali, Lahej—11 salutes—2 sons, 1 brother, 24 cousins.

Nobody but Allah knows which of the two sons, one brother or twenty-four cousins is going to follow His Highness on the throne of Lahej.

Britain is trying to bring some system to the succession. In the case of the Abdali sultan they have been successful, and the eldest son of His Highness is recognized as Crown Prince. But with all the others succession is a vague concept, slumbering in the lap of the dark future. To this end the genial W. H. Ingram founded this school, which has become the Eton of the Near East.

Only Mr. Ingram himself could tell the story of how difficult it was to establish such an institution. The original idea was to select the ablest and healthiest of the chiefs' sons, to bring them to Aden, and, after cleansing them of the sand of the desert, put them into a neat uniform and reform them mentally and bodily. Mr. Ingram's theory was, and his theory found hearty support in the Residency, that it would be easier to govern the country if the native rulers were raised to manhood under the direct influence of Britain.

At first the chiefs objected. "Alas," they said, "now the Government wants our sons, our best ones, as hostages. They are willing to keep them, to feed them and to dress them, but there is nothing unselfish in their generosity. They want our sons to keep us quiet. No and never ! We will not surrender our sons, and if they take them, they can do it only by force. And that will mean the end of the friendship !"

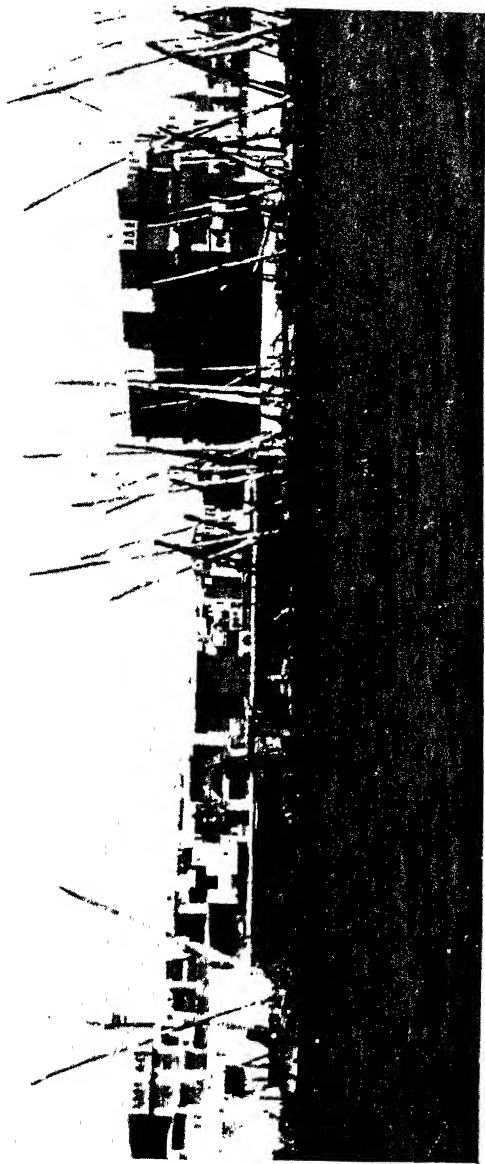
At first it really seemed that the friendly gesture would create unrest, mistrust, and even rebellion. But then a broadminded sultan sent his son, a boy of eight, to Aden; soon a second little crown prince followed, and today there are some forty cadets in this unique public school.

I saw the princely cadets studying the Arabic alphabet, mathematics, elementary constitutional theories, and, what is even more important, playing football, cricket and tennis. They were neat, polite and civilized; one could scarcely believe that only a few months before these little madcaps had been forgotten thorns on desert bushes.

At vacation times the cadets are sent home for holidays, and so the old chiefs realize they are not being kept behind prison bars. They even come to the school to visit their little ones and some seem ashamed of their own savage behaviour in the presence of the fine manners of their youngsters. While I was there the old Sheikh of the Quotaibis came to visit his grandson. Proudly the little man showed him the fine, clean building, the playground, and the dignified tiny mosque. The sheikh followed his grandson with speechless admiration, and expressed it by spitting on the immaculate stone floor. The shocked little prince promptly reproached the old warrior, and warned him to forget his savage manners until his return to the desert.

We had tea under the airy arcades of the school which overlooked the blue beauty of the Bay of Aden, and Mr. Ingram told me that the two latest additions to the corps of cadets were sons of Hadhrami chiefs, the first Hadhramis among the undergraduates. "I brought them by 'plane," he said, beaming, "and believe me they were scared when the huge bird left the ground. But it was a good lesson in civilization: they were the less scared when they entered their school."

AT SEA OFF JEDDAH





A WEDDING FESTIVAL AT ADEN

(NG) 11

"The Hadhramauth, you said," I hastily took up the thread of the conversation. "It seems that the Hadhramauth still gives you plenty of headaches."

But Ingram's face betrayed no concern. "Not at all," he answered, "there is nothing wrong with the Hadhramauth." He then told me the story of the rebellion. It was a story, fascinating and truly Oriental, both in its primitive naivety and its savage horror; the story of the difficulties the white man encounters when penetrating these closed countries, and the story of the peculiar spiritual world of the Arabs, still desperately clinging to their glorious past while already flirting with a future they want yet fear. But above all, it was the story of humane conquest, rare in this age of poison gas.

Ingram did not mention the machinations of Italian *agents provocateurs*. He began with the trouble itself. It all started when Bedouin highwaymen besieged the main caravan track which winds from Mukalla at the Indian Ocean through the grand canyons of the Wadi Doan, deep in the interior, then turns west at the southernmost frontiers of the Rub-al-Qali until it crosses the Yemen border. This caravan route is the lifeline of southern Arabia, the only connecting link between the sea and the scarcely populated inland. The prosperity of the whole country, and the life of its inhabitants, depend entirely upon the safety of this route. When raids on the route became increasingly frequent, the Aden Government instructed the Sultan of Mukalla to restore order and to disperse the raiding desert bandits. Although the native authorities knew which tribes were responsible for the raids they feared them and were reluctant to send a punitive expedition against them. According to the unwritten laws of the desert, these raids were regarded as the favourite sports of a fighting race rather than a criminal offence.

Finally, W. H. Ingram was sent to Mukalla to see for himself. He was no newcomer in the Hadhramauth ; as a matter of fact, he knew the country well, for he had travelled it extensively. During these early travels Ingram had made many friends ; most of the chiefs were his friends, and through his wife, Dora Ingram, an extraordinary woman, daughter of Britain's former Home Secretary, Edward Shortt, he had even found means to influence the men through their wives. Mrs. Ingram spent her time in the harems, and while her husband conferred with the chiefs, she made friendships with the ladies of Arabia. Apart from being on the best possible terms with the Hadhramauth's two sultans, he established fine connections with members of the powerful Al Kaif families and a number of other influential chiefs.

Trusting the proverbial sanctity of friendship and the laws of hospitality, he ventured into the Hadhramauth alone and unarmed when hostilities would not cease. He visited the unruly tribes in their strongholds, and obtained pledges from them not to harass caravans any more. But on his return trip to Mukalla his own caravan was raided, ambushed and shot at by members of these very tribes. He realized that the pledges were only a ruse to get rid of him, and to uphold the white man's authority he decided to punish the rebelling tribes.

As soon as he returned to Mukalla he summoned the chief of a guilty tribe for public trial. The Sultan's Governor presided. With self-confident impudence the chief confessed "the crime", and Ingram sentenced the village to a fine of thirty dollars, thirty sheep, thirty camels, thirty rifles, and thirty nobles of their tribe as hostages for their good behaviour. The chief promised to send the fines and hostages immediately on his return to the village, but instead sent a messenger informing Ingram that they had not the

slightest intention of paying the fine, and if he wanted it "so let him come in person and collect it"! Although the messenger behaved outrageously, Ingram did not punish him. Instead, he sent him back to his tribe with another message: "Tell your sheikh if he insists I shall come and collect the fine myself. But I shall be accompanied by the aeroplanes of His Majesty, and that will mean the end of his tribe!"

In spite of the stern warning, the chief was still determined not to obey. Ingram sent word to Aden requesting a squadron of bombers, just to show the Arabs that he really meant what he was saying. The 'planes made merely a warning flight over the villages and returned to Aden. Whereupon Ingram sent another message to the Arabs: "Should the 'planes be compelled to return once more they will not act so peacefully." Even this did not check the spirit of the Bedous, and in an insolent reply they invited the 'planes to their villages.

And the 'planes came at once. This time they again dropped leaflets, declaring that "the 'planes would bomb their villages and would not leave stone upon stone" should the fines and hostages not be sent by the end of the week. Saturday came, Ingram's ultimatum expired at noon, and in the afternoon the squadron of bombers appeared again. All the inhabitants were in the street shouting at the 'planes, which flew low, dropping more leaflets. There were visitors too. They came from adjoining villages and neighbouring tribes to enjoy the improvised spectacle. The usual Italian agents were there too, inciting the villagers to defiance: "The British will never dare to bomb you; it is all an empty threat! If you do as they want, and leave your houses, they will consider you cowards and your flight a surrender. But if you stay on it will mean the defeat of these Ingliz threats and the victory of your cause!"

For this time the message stated that the village would be bombed immediately after sunrise the next morning, and urged the villagers to leave their houses if they wished to escape with their lives. Ingram's action was not directed against the lives of the Arabs, but merely against their property.

This last warning was still ridiculed by the agitators, and consequently not a single member of the community had left the huts when the 'planes appeared above the village early the next morning. The bombers went into action immediately. A bomb was dropped; it exploded in the little square in the centre of the village. It was only a practice bomb, but made enough noise to have the desired effect. In a flash, in a panic and in a lightning hurry, the villagers fled, carrying with them whatever they could. Even the agitators took to their heels.

The 'planes circled low over the houses and huts, and when they were certain that everyone had left and was far enough away from the doomed village the bombers released their cargo. One-hundred-pound charges fell, one after the other; on to the empty houses. The mud of the huts, the wood of thrifty furniture, the torn rags of women's silk dresses went flying in the dust and smoke-filled air as the earth quaked with the fury of the bombs and rumbled like the sound of distant thunderclap.

From the distance the villagers saw their homes disappear from the face of the earth. What was left was but a smoking, smouldering heap of dust and mud.

Sayed Ingram had collected his fine!

The bombers returned to Aden and Ingram considered the incident closed. He was convinced that the tale of the doomed village would spread like wild-fire throughout the whole of the Hadhramauth and that there would be no more raids. Less than a week later a delegation from the demolished village appeared

in Mukalla. Their leader went into the Little Palace, where Ingram had his headquarters, and bowing low before the exalted Master, asked him to come out into the courtyard. There were the thirty sheep, the thirty camels, the thirty rifles, a chief with the thirty dollars, and, chained together, the thirty hostages. The village was paying its fine.

Even Ingram, this hard-boiled peacemaker of the desert, was surprised. The sheikh went up to him, fell upon his knees and kissed his hands and feet.

"You are our real Sultan, Sayed Ingram," the old man said, "and we are here to thank you for bombing our village and thus saving our honour. It was never our intention to defy your will; we were ready to deliver the fines and hostages, as you commanded. But neighbouring tribes and men possessed by the Evil One came to our village and said unto us: 'You are cowards if you pay the fine and bend to the command of an infidel!' Wallah, we are no cowards, and so we refused to pay the fine. We refused to leave our houses when your flying-machines appeared above our heads, so long as it was safe to stay in them. But now that our houses are destroyed and our honour is cleared we bring you the fine and the hostages. They are all yours in the name of Allah, the Merciful and Compassionate, who sent your aeroplanes to punish our childish pride and stubbornness. And cursed be those evil ones who caused the destruction to be visited upon our village. We said unto Hell: 'Art thou full?' and Hell replied: 'Why? Are there more to come?' Wallah, there are! Those damned dogs who made us believe that our will could be stronger than the bombs of your flying-machines."

The hostages were released, but the fine kept. Peace returned to the Hadhramauth, a lasting peace, with Ingram watching over it. The Italians made the most of this "peaceful bombardment". Their papers

were filled with horror stories of Britain's rule of terror in the Hadhramauth. As late as January 1938 the usually well-informed Italian monthly *Oriente Moderno* printed another of these invented tales: "In the meantime the military operations for the complete domination of the Hadhramauth are being continued with the utmost ruthlessness."

The only "military operation" was, in reality, a one-man war: W. H. Ingram alone fighting the fiery Bedou warriors of the Hadhramauth, and "completing the domination" of this vast protectorate, the only engagement having been the bombing I have just described.

Although I had no reason to doubt Ingram, the Italian reports and St. John Philby's letter to *The Times* made me wonder if there was another side to the story. Returning from the school for prospective sheikhs I stopped my car at Maala, the native harbour where the dhows from Muscat and Mukalla anchor when calling at Aden. I found scores of Hadhramis, both townfolk and Bedous from the interior. I selected a couple of fierce-looking warriors who wore the empty scabbards of their knives tied to their upper arms. The sharp knives had to be deposited with the police during their stay in Aden.

I took them to my hotel. I knew how to gain the confidence of these suspicious people, and as we sat on the carpet of my room, sipping ice-cooled lemon squash, we became fast friends. One of the fellows, an unusually dark chap with long, wavy, shiny hair falling in a heavy mass on his shoulders, was especially impressed by my hospitality. His name was Farouk, and it made him happy to learn that my name was Farago. To complete the similarity and as a sign of his esteem he promptly decided to change "Farouk" into "Farago" from then on and for ever. This made us

cousins, and there are no secrets between Arab cousins.

My new namesake came from a village called Owran in the Wadi Doan, not very far from the scene of the punitive expedition. "Farago" was a Bedou and not one of the town-dwellers who were naturally opposed to the raiding hordes of the desert bandits. But he cursed the Bedous and praised Sayed Ingram. There was horror in his eyes as he told me of life in the Hadhramauth before Ingram had restored peace and order. The men of the poverty-stricken villages had had not a moment of peace as they were in constant fear of attack by Bedou hordes. They were afraid to let their camels and goats graze in the country, and, even worse, women and children were not safe from these roving highwaymen, whose favourite game was kidnapping for ransom.

"Our fathers, the fathers of our fathers, and then again the fathers of the fathers of our fathers, were all good warriors whose life was fight," he said. "But those times were different: foreign merchants came to the Hadhramauth and it was not wrong to raid and loot those foreigners, because they raided and looted us by demanding outrageous prices for their wares. But since then many of our own people have been to Zanzibar, to Singapore and to the Dutch East Indies and have returned as merchants themselves. They are our own kin, and when they are robbed and killed, Hadhrami property is wasted and Hadhrami blood is spilled.

"We could call neither the days nor the nights our own," Farouk continued. "We dug deep ditches around our villages and behind them we erected high walls. We were forced to live our lives within these walls; our lands were laid waste, and nobody dared drive the cattle out to the watering-places; and we ourselves suffered from hunger and thirst.

Wallah," he exclaimed, "it was a life not worth living!"

Farouk used the most beautiful words in the Arabic language when he spoke of trouble-shooting, peace-making W. H. Ingram and Dora Ingram. "We have many sultans, sheikhs and chiefs," he said, "but, although they are Arabs, they do not have our welfare at heart; they think only of their own personal enrichment. Sayed Ingram is unselfish, generous, kind and good; our worries are his worries, and our grievances are his. Sayed Ingram is our real Sultan. He is Ingram the Good!"

(3) *Feud of Kings*

I was still entertaining Farouk the Sailor when Ali admitted a tall, slender, dignified Arab whose extremely fine features commanded immediate respect. His clothes stamped him a stranger in Aden: he wore a combination of the picturesque Bedouin costume and the sober suit of the town-dweller. Ali introduced his friend: "This is Sayed Omar, sahib, a wealthy merchant from Jeizan in Assir. He has just arrived in Aden, and has brought interesting news. There is war on the northern frontier of the Yemen."

War in the Yemen was more than I had hoped for, even though I had always believed that the unsettled political affairs of this country would eventually result in a war that would involve not only hostile Arab kings, but England and Italy as well. The Yemen has always been considered a precious possession by Italy and England, as well as by Saudi Arabia, the powerful big brother to the north. But thus far they have all been reluctant to make a move. England has been satisfied with the Yemen's status of independence, because she considers it a buffer State between her

own possessions and the expanding Wahabis, and to this end has often even encouraged the Yemen's exaggerated chauvinism. Had it not been for England's interest Italy would long ago have occupied the defenceless Arab country. Mussolini, however, has always preferred to evade open conflict with Britain, and since he is convinced that Britain would never consent to an Italian occupation, he has postponed action pending a general European conflagration. The third aspirant, however, has already resorted to force. He is the mighty Saudian, Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud.

Ibn Saud's rise on the Arabian Peninsula is similar to Hitler's rise in Europe, and his technique is a carbon copy of Hitler's political methods. Only twenty years ago the Wahabi king was a restless tribal leader who, from Rayedh, his fortified residence in the middle of the desert, harassed the neighbouring Arab kingdoms of the Hejaz and of Assir. His was a kingdom based upon ancient laws, while in the Hejaz and in Assir ruled kings who, flirting with European powers, were willing to make fundamental political changes. They had the promise of England's protection, but when Ibn Saud went into action this promise turned out to be an empty phrase. Just as with Hitler today, Ibn Saud then employed the tactics of wait-and-see. He awaited the most favourable moment, and struck only when success seemed certain.

The King of the Hejaz was master of Mecca and Medina, the holy cities of Arabia, and Ibn Saud insisted that these sanctuaries were in heathen hands. Ibn Saud, accusing religious Hussein, King of the Hejaz, of being interested in Mecca and Medina merely as a source of income from pilgrimages, declared a holy war against the blasphemous shereef. Soon his savage Wahabis captured Mecca and Medina. Hussein had to flee, and the only help he was given by his mighty protectors, the English, was a British destroyer to escape the fury

of the Wahabis. He was transported to Cyprus, where he went into business, failed, and died in comparative poverty. His son, Ali, however, retained Jeddah and ruled there as king for a short time. But Ibn Saud was after the whole of the Hejaz, and two years later his Wahabis marched into Ali's tottering kingdom. Only then did the world realize that in Ibn Saud Arabia had given birth to the first man since Mohammed with the ability and strength to unite all Arabia.

To the south of Ibn Saud's enlarged kingdom there still remained two independent Arab countries: the Assir, ruled by the impotent and corrupt Idrissi, and the Yemen under the shrewd and able rule of Imam Yahya. Although Ibn Saud assured the English that his appetite had been satisfied by the Hejaz, his troops were soon on the march again. Little Assir was conquered almost without resistance, and again English protection was confined merely to a destroyer for the flight of the Idrissi. The fleeing monarch was taken to Luxor in Egypt, where he still lives on the remnants of a once huge fortune.

The dream of Lord Kitchener, who had always advocated a United States of Arabia, was practically realized. Arabia was *almost* united—by an Arab and against the will of the English. Ibn Saud was ruler over territories exceeding 1,100,000 square miles out of Arabia's total of 1,200,000 square miles. In Nej, in the Hejaz, and in Assir there waved the Wahabis' green flag with the white inscription: "There is no God but God, Mohammed is the Prophet of God."

Ibn Saud's expansion was a severe blow to British authority in Arabia; in fact, it was the first sign of decay in the political power of the impregnable British Empire. From 1917 to 1923 Britain had paid into Ibn Saud's treasury a subsidy of £550,000 subject to the following conditions:

(1) That he refrain and restrain his followers from aggressive action against the Hejaz, Kuweit and Assir ;

(2) That he co-operate in the matter of the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) by maintaining the safety of pilgrim routes through his territory.

(3) That he consent to be guided generally by the wishes of His Majesty's Government with regard to his foreign policy, and co-operate with them in the promotion of their own policy, the objective of which is the maintenance of peaceful conditions in Arab countries.

In spite of this treaty Ibn Saud upset the peace of Arabia in 1921 when he captured Shammar, in 1925 when he completed the conquest of the Hejaz, and in 1927 when he marched against Assir. In retaliation Britain stopped Ibn Saud's subsidy, but was compelled to recognize him "as an independent ruler, King of the Hejaz and of Nej and its Dependencies" in the Treaty of Jeddah of 1927.

Apart from a few tiny Sultanates, virtually owned by Britain, there remained only the Yemen. Ever since his occupation of Assir, Ibn Saud had made preparations to swallow the Yemen too. His plans were well advanced in 1932 when Philby, addressing a distinguished gathering at Oxford, committed a slight indiscretion. He said : "Ibn Saud is ruler over all the Arabs," but then, realizing his *faux pas*, he paused for a second and added : "Well, over nearly all !"

Two years later Ibn Saud's Wahabis crossed the Yemen frontiers and, meeting no resistance, were in possession of the coastal areas including Hodeida within a few weeks. Now Britain, even though she had made no promise to protect the Yemen, stepped in because she realized that should powerful Ibn Saud get possession of the Yemen he would continue his advance to Aden. With tremendous diplomatic pressure Ibn Saud was finally persuaded to withdraw his victorious forces from the already partially conquered

Yemen. This deal cost Britain plenty of money: more in one instalment than the Wahabi king had received as his seven-year subsidy.

But the troops of Ibn Saud were kept near the Yemen border, with headquarters in Jeizan and Abha, the two largest towns of Assir, in readiness to repeat their "march on Hodeida" should the British look away. The presence of this formidable Wahabi force was an eternal menace and resulted in repeated frontier clashes, which were always settled by British intermediaries. This was the situation in April 1937, and the news that Sayed Omar brought from Jeizan seemed to indicate that Ibn Saud considered the time ripe for a final blow.

There could be no doubt that Sayed Omar's information was reliable: he himself witnessed the first clashes. "Al Melech's troops are on the march," he said, "under the command of the Governor of Assir. They will be in Hodeida in no time." Everything pointed towards a major war, and not insignificant desert skirmishes. I knew that should Ibn Saud really make war against Imam Yahya it would draw British and Italian intervention, in which Britain and Italy would be on opposite sides. Thus what began as a clash between two Arab kings would probably develop into war between England and Italy.

The news of this Oriental war was not served for breakfast to European and American newspaper-readers like the over-publicized Ethiopian campaign. As a matter of fact, the editors did not even know there was a war brewing.

Sayed Omar knew the details: "The King has sent divisions of his regular army—armoured cars, motorized units and wireless equipment. They have already crossed the border, and are now marching on Midi." Out came my map, and I located Midi just north of

Hodeida, within Yemen boundaries. It was the Yemen's northernmost seaport, with some 10,000 inhabitants, and important in the Red Sea trade.

"Are the Yemeni resisting?" I inquired. And Sayed Omar said: "Yes. The Imam is rushing troops to the north. My friends across the border report that 25,000 Yemeni soldiers have been ordered to Midi."

In a flash my mind was made up: "We go to Midi at once!" I said to Ali; but Ali looked flabbergasted:

"To Midi? But how?"

"Somehow!" I turned to my guest: "When are you returning home, Sayed Omar?" He said he would sail in two days if he could find a dhow calling at Midi.

"I'll charter a dhow, and if you want to join us please be my guest."

It seemed I was about to embark upon a dangerous adventure. Sailing in a native dhow is hazardous, for they do not always arrive at their destination. Sometimes they are attacked, robbed and sunk by Red Sea Bedouins; often they become victims of sudden Red Sea gales, or perish in the waves off their course, since their skippers have not the faintest idea of navigation and sail without compass. Besides, having no permit to enter either the Yemen or Assir, I was running the risk of being arrested and maltreated upon landing.

In spite of everything, I found myself in Maala, the native harbour, looking for a suitable dhow. There were many idle dhows about, but no skipper willing to accept my offer, since the season of favourable winds was approaching its end. They argued that even if it should take only a week to reach Midi, they might be compelled to spend six months up north awaiting the monsoon of the autumn for their return journey, and sailing up with an inquisitive foreigner

would not compensate them for the loss of time. But in one of Maala's cafés I found a skipper from Muscat whose dhow was loaded for a journey to the north. His price was £7 10s., and a warning: "If you are made of sugar you will melt before we arrive in Midi. Travel on our zambuqs is no joy-ride. Are you prepared for hardships and risks?"

"I am!"

"We sail at eight o'clock tomorrow, if Allah wills."

"Never mind God," I said; "the question is, will you?"

"By Allah, I will!"

I was making hasty preparations for my departure when Ali came to tell me that his wife and mother-in-law objected to his coming with me on such a mad journey. He was broken-hearted. Even my faithful boy, Ali II, resigned when he learned what I was about to do. I hired my namesake, Farago, the young Hadhraumi, who was Farouk before he met me. He was overwhelmed with joy when I told him about the trip.

I bought provisions for many weeks, and a hundred various trifles, for you must not forget a corkscrew or any other seemingly insignificant thing on such a trip if you expect your journey to be bearable. Shortly before four o'clock of the next afternoon I boarded the dhow and found the "captain" and his crew of seventeen ready to sail.

The zambuq was an impossible craft. She was said to draw thirty tons of water, was about thirty-six feet over all, and had a twelve-foot beam. Two-masted, she was built by natives in Muscat, where the art of ship-building is handed down from generation to generation. She had a single open deck exposed to the rain and broiling sun. My quarters, some ten square feet, were just forward the primitive bridge, which was a slightly elevated platform near the stern, where the

captain and the two helmsmen slept. The forward wall of my enclosure was the smelly cargo of drying plants for coffee bales, consigned for Mocha. The crew's quarters were forward; man lay on man and on sacks filled with salt. Over the keel, in the centre of the crew's quarters, was the open cooking-fire, hung with kettles of boiling water. It was the same sort of boat in which Jesus sailed the Sea of Galilee, and which the Arabs have been using in their trade with Port Said since time immemorial.

I stood on the bridge looking at this primitive relic and wondered what the good dhow *Faqtalchar*—"Lucky", as she was called—had in store for me!

Believe it or not, punctually at four o'clock we hoisted our sails and the journey began. There was hardly any wind in the Bay of Aden, but we were moving, and the inner harbour of Maala was slowly receding. We were making about a quarter of a knot an hour. It was the end of a glorious day, and the late-afternoon sun was sinking swiftly on the horizon. The strange purple of the sky darkened into approaching night, the lights of Aden were switched on, and above the bridge the helmsman lighted a primitive seed-oil lamp. The flame of the cook-fire cast long shadows over the salt sacks, betraying the men who sat around chatting and chanting. It was a magnificent and strange experience; barely two miles off Aden and its many miracles of modern civilization I was back in the Middle Ages—as if a time machine had carelessly carried me off into past centuries.

"YA'L'ALLAH AL ALLAH IL ALLAH MOHAMMED RASUL AL ALLAH!"

It was sunset, the time of the fourth prayer, and the hoarse, ageing voice of the nachoda, who was also the

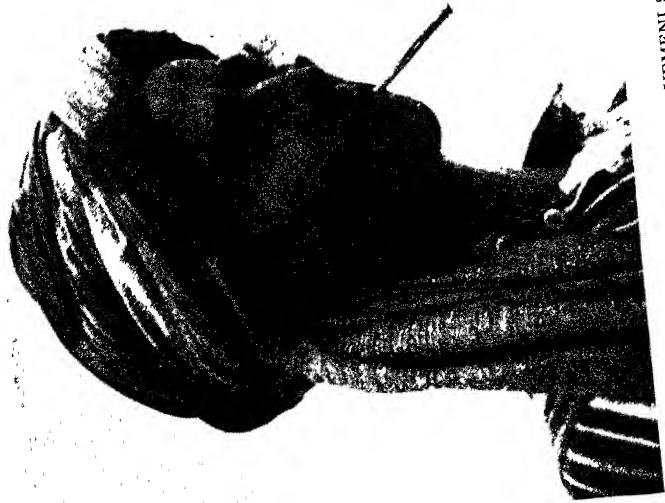
Muezzin and the Imam of this tiny Moslem community, was chanting the call to all True Believers to cleanse themselves and come into the presence of Allah. The motionless shadows around the fire suddenly came to life.

IN THE NAME OF THE MOST MERCIFUL GOD

Praise be to God, the Lord of all creatures ; the most merciful, the King of the Day of Judgment. Thee do we worship, and of thee do we beg assistance. Direct us in the right way, in the way of those to whom thou hast been gracious ; not of those against whom thou art incensed, nor of those who go astray.

The captain, Farouk, and all the seventeen members of the crew chanted in religious trance, a daily routine which has never lost its devout meaning to them. And while all these men were turning to their God I sat there alone, an infidel, with no supplication in my heart. Of a sudden I caught myself murmuring a prayer : a childish little one I used to say before going to sleep many, many years ago. . . .

The prayer over, the men returned to their fire, and the nachoda went down to sit among them. I lay on my hard resting-place and listened. They spoke of God, until no one had anything more to say. There was a deep, motionless silence over the boat : nothing moved, no sound interrupted the absolute quiet. And then the cracked voice of the old nachoda broke in again. Chanting to a monotonous melody he began : "There is no God but God, and Mohammed is the Prophet of God." He went on and on until each man joined in, and all their voices united in a strange choir praising Allah in their own devout way. The simple melody soon conquered my ear, and the rhythm of the chant was in my blood. I can still hear it today, thirteen months later : "There is no God but God,



A YOUNG YEMENI SHEIKH



THE SULTAN OF LAHEJ

and Mohammed is the Prophet of God." The men were still chanting their monotonous lullaby as I fell asleep.

Was it the sea air, the strange experience, or just fatigue? I slept for twelve full hours. It was shortly after six o'clock in the morning, and the sun was already climbing on the horizon, when I awoke and looked around. There was still no wind, not even a breeze, and after fourteen hours at sea we were still in the waters of Aden. It seemed as if the men had not changed their positions since the previous night: they were still sitting around the fire in motionless indifference. But I was impatient and rushed to the nachoda:

"Where is the wind, Nachoda?" I asked; but he just shrugged his shoulders and smiled. "What is the meaning of this?" I shouted. "When do you expect the wind to take us out of the bay?"

"Allah is the director of winds," he said quietly; "how should I know His intentions? As soon as He deems it right, we will have wind aplenty." He looked up to the sky and added: "*Inshallah*—if Allah will!"

The sky was a perfect blue, the sun shone gloriously, and complete calm lay over the waters. I was boiling; should I sit here waiting for the wind, perhaps for days, or should I go back to Aden now? The dhow's first stop was Jibuti, across the water, and I knew it would take them a week to cross at this season of the winds, while a steamer would do it in twelve hours. My decision was immediate: I would paddle back to Aden, take the steamer and await the *Lucky* in Jibuti.

CHAPTER XV

JIBUTI TOPSY-TURVY

WHEN I first visited Jibuti, in 1935, the town was a strange, remote place. Eleven degrees north of the Equator, it had all the comforts and discomforts of a French provincial town. It was a city of contrasts, of a thousand and one moods ; the inhabitants were at once obsequious and impudent, laughing and sullen, contented and sad, rich and poverty-stricken, purse-proud and unassuming.

Ever since, I longed to revisit the little capital of French-Somaliland, probably the only place on earth where people succeed in being saints and sinners in the one and the same breath. Old hand at the Near East, I always managed to get the best of the shrewd merchants in the bazaars of Cairo and Damascus, but was cheated like a tenderfoot in Jibuti's open-air shopping centre, the Place Menelik. I did not mind being cheated, however, because the Jibuti traders practise their fraud with such unsurpassable charm that I found myself smiling every time I meant to rage.

Three years ago Jibuti was still spared the troubles brewing in Europe. There was plenty of talk about Il Duce's impending campaign against Ethiopia, but the waves of excitement were still far from the yellow shores of French Somaliland. The only indicator of coming events was a couple of freight-cars on a siding of the Franco-Ethiopian railway,

loaded with a consignment of arms and munitions for Haile Selassie.

The historical events of the past few years have radically altered Jibuti's mentality. Now the town was hysterical, on the verge of a nervous breakdown, brought on by the exciting happenings next door in Ethiopia. The people, blacks and whites alike, had lost their bewitching allure, and were just plain scoundrels, who, in their haste to make money, did not bother to hide their deception behind a smoke-screen of amenity. Italy's military operations in the neighbourhood made Jibuti a clearing-house, and a general department store where the Italians could get immediate delivery of anything from safety-pins to machine-guns. Abyssinia's tragedy was Jibuti's good fortune. It resulted in the biggest boom Jibuti has ever experienced. The town was overrun; there were a few honest business men and an immense army of unscrupulous commercial conjurers, who had come down to the Indian Ocean seeking their Eldorado. The example set by these third-rate Europeans was eagerly followed by the natives; when the authorities would attempt to punish Somalis caught at fraudulent dealings they would just point to those Europeans who were doing the same. It was Africa's twentieth-century replica of San Francisco's Barbary Coast. Everything was imported from Europe: drinks and girls for local consumption as well as the merchandise designed for Ethiopia.

Hotels and night-clubs popped out of the earth like mushrooms after rain; there were more than thirty hotels in this town of only ten thousand permanent inhabitants. Yet the native clerks turned a cold shoulder to me when I asked for a room. Finally the Swiss owner of the Hôtel Français, where I had previously stayed, took pity on me, and crammed a battered couch into the already overcrowded

courtyard of his establishment. His rooms were all occupied by Jibuti's "temporary residents"—about four thousand, the majority of them Italians—and converted into improvised shops and offices.

The Italo-Abyssinian war was being continued here between transient traders and emboldened refugees. I had been in town hardly two hours when I witnessed a battle in the Place Menelik. A group of Italian business men were celebrating on the terrace of the Continental Café. Their gay songs angered some passing Abyssinians, and soon a group of refugees gathered in front of the café, casting hostile glances at the intoxicated conquerors. One of the Italians hurled a champagne bottle into the crowd and hit an Abyssinian youth. Promptly the Ethiopian refugees stormed the festive group. Bottles became weapons, and soon fresh blood mingled with bubbling champagne on the cement of the sidewalk. A detachment of native policemen rushed to the scene, but instead of dispersing the Abyssinians, joined in beating up the unpopular Italians, who retreated into the lobby of the hotel, cursing the French administration for its helplessness. Similar incidents occurring nightly undermined the prestige not only of the Italians but of all white men in this black community. Soon His Excellency the Governor issued a statement requesting "*les Messieurs Italiens et Ethiopiens*" to refrain from creating further disturbances and reminding them of the dignity of their respective races. His warning was wrapped in true French courtesy; it was a very human document indeed. Still, the bloody bouts continued, and it became unsafe for a white man to venture on the street after dark.

I mourned the lost beauty of Jibuti, and could not wait to make my escape from this Sodom. Some of my Abyssinian friends suggested I go to Ethiopia and see for myself how bad things were under Italian

rule. So I went to the Italian Consul for a permit, but the clerk in the reception-room laughed in my face; he bluntly informed me that Ethiopia was a closed country so far as foreigners were concerned and that even Italians could enter only if they were in possession of a Fascist Party membership card—and a low number at that.

Since slipping through closed frontiers had become my favourite pastime on this trip, I boarded a train *en route* to the border the following morning. At the frontier station of Douanle I met an old friend of mine, a fellow named Gabru Markos, who had been secretary to the Addis Ababa Chief of Police in pre-Italian days. He had aged considerably since our last meeting, and his immaculate clothes had been replaced by the tattered uniform of an Ethiopian officer. He was a sort of Salvation Army post to aid refugees from Ethiopia. He was also gathering news from the isolated country, passing it on to the accredited Ethiopian consul, still representing Haile Selassie in Jibuti.

I inquired about some prominent Ethiopians. "Where is Blatta Kidane?" I asked first, because this former under-secretary in the Imperial Ministry of Education was closest to my heart while I was in Abyssinia. Gabru answered:

"When the Emperor left Addis a handful of Abyssinian patriots volunteered to remain behind to pretend submission, but really to bore at the Italian administration from within. Kidane's services were accepted by the Italians, until a squealer betrayed these brave men. Blatta Kidane was taken to Asmara and executed."

"What happened to Tadessa Mashasha?"

"Killed."

"And Ato Berhan?"

"Killed." Only two of my old acquaintances

were still alive. One was a certain Abyssinian, who had been in charge of the wireless station in Addis Ababa during the war, but already then secretly in the pay of the Italians. Now he was working openly as an Italian agent, as liaison officer between the Italian Secret Police and the many unscrupulous native informers. The other was Blatta Taklu, the former Mayor of Addis Ababa. He managed to escape and was commanding a band of Ethiopian irregulars in the south.

Only three Ras were still alive : Ras Seyoum, Chief of Tigre ; Ras Gugsä, son-in-law of the ex-Emperor ; and Ras Hailu, Haile Selassie's once mighty adversary.

Seyoum was now in Rome, whither the Italians had taken him for safety when he begged for protection after his own subjects had threatened his life upon his return alive from conquered Addis.

Gugsä, who had deserted to the Italians shortly after the beginning of the war, was living in Makale happily.

Hailu was the only active one. He, whom the ex-Emperor had kept on the prison island in Lake Zwai until the Italian occupation freed him, was constantly travelling between Addis and Rome. Although he swore allegiance to them voluntarily the Italians distrusted him. "He did the same with Haile Selassie," Gabru added, "yet he rebelled against the Emperor. He is a reckless man of action, filled with ambition, and would like to climb on the throne of Ethiopia over the dead body of the Italians. He is our last hope, for even as he bows homage to the Viceroy he is planning to drive the Italian forces out of the country."

Although these homeless Ethiopians hated the Italians, they spoke kindly of Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, the former Viceroy of Ethiopia.

"He has always tried to use humane methods

towards our conquered people," the spokesman of this bunch of refugees said, "but his orders from Rome were to be ruthless as possible. He respected the Ethiopian chiefs who had fought courageously against him. For instance, when Ras Imru was taken prisoner, Rome ordered his immediate execution, but the Marshal refused to obey this order. 'Ras Imru is a prisoner of war,' he said, 'and his bravery entitles him to the honours of war. He fought us honestly until he could fight no more.'"

When Marshal Graziani dispatched a force against Ras Desta, the Emperor's other son-in-law, and the last Ras to hold out against Italy, he is reputed to have said to his aides: "I hope the poor devil manages to escape into Kenya." Ras Desta did not try to escape; he stood his ground and gave battle. He was defeated, taken prisoner, and executed on the spot. In his case the Marshal was even more generous than the Ras's own countryman. Although they mourned him, they all agreed he had got his due. Right up to the end of the campaign he had profiteered. The ammunition sent him from Addis Ababa he sold to his soldiers. Those who had no money received no ammunition; the fact that there was a war seemed to make no difference to this ruthless Ethiopian.

"Italy claims that Ethiopia has been conquered," Gabru said, "but this is far from being true. They control the towns and the areas around the towns. The rest of the country is beyond their control. Only twenty miles from Dessye a strong Ethiopian force commands the main road from Asmara to Addis Ababa. No Italian vehicle can pass."

All over the country bands of native irregulars harass the invaders. More Italians have been killed in these skirmishes since the end of the war than were killed during the war itself. The "conquerors" can move only in large forces, convoyed by tanks and

armoured cars, under the protection of reconnoitring planes.

Gabru volunteered to take me south, where I could see a number of Ethiopian free companies on the war-path, dashing in and out of their country across the unprotected frontiers of French and British Somalilands. They came to the Somalilands, where from unknown sources they received arms, munitions and provisions, and then disappeared again to inflict heavy loss of life and property, and thus paralyse the peaceful development of what is now part of the Roman Empire. Unfortunately, I was not properly prepared for such an expedition, and so, instead, I went back to Jibuti.

I returned to Jibuti to find the town in a new boom; this time it was picks and spades. The whole staff of the Italian Consulate and all the officials of the Italian Trading Company were buying up all picks and spades available, and when the stores ran out of them they bought from anyone willing to sell. Within a half-hour a rusty garden-spade was worth a fabulous sum, and the whole town turned out, carrying spades and picks for sale.

They were needed to "rearm" two boatsful of Italian labourers who had arrived off Jibuti the night before. In reality they were soldiers *en route* to Ethiopia, and had come via Jibuti only because the roads connecting Italian Eritrea with Abyssinia were unsafe even for troops. Since the French Government refuses to permit Italian soldiers to pass through Somaliland the Italian Government declared them agricultural labourers and thus obtained the *laissez passer* under false pretences. The French insisted that each of these alleged labourers carry either a spade or a pick, and the trouble started when the Italian quartermaster discovered, to his bewilderment, that there were more soldiers than spades on board.

It was nearly sunset before a sufficient number of spades had been purchased to permit the troops to land. They were brought ashore in row-boats, and as they climbed up on the wharf I was startled to see that they were mostly elderly men, between the ages of forty and fifty. They were hoarded in the yard of the Italian Trading Company to await a train to take them to Ethiopia. There was indifference and fatigue in their faces as an officer distributed coffee, bread and literature. It looked as if the printed matter was meant to make up for the short rations. There was a postcard, with Il Duce's stern face under a steel helmet, inscribed "Mussolini is Always Right", and a booklet entitled *Ten Commandments for Our Legionaries*. Looking through one of these very martial booklets, I learned why these men had been taken from their families and shipped to Ethiopia. The ninth commandment read: "Always remember that you are a legionary fighting for Duce, King and God."

Duce, King and God!—that was the exact sequence.

While they were studying their literature, a troop-train bringing home-going Italians from Ethiopia arrived at the station a few blocks away. Never in my life have I seen more wretched caricatures of men than these worn-out and discarded Italians. "We haven't had a decent meal since we left Addis about five days ago," one of them told me, speaking with a heavy South Tyrolean accent. The natives were familiar with this grievance of home-going Italians, and besieged the troop-train with huge quantities of bread and milk, selling everything at exorbitant prices. The starving conquerors had to spend their last lire for a piece of bread.

The transport officers took special care to keep the two groups from meeting. Only after the home-going troops had been taken aboard the two waiting steamers were the new arrivals marched to the station

and into the freight cars. The Italian conquerors were packed in cattle-cars, forty men in each. An Ethiopian, watching this spectacle, exclaimed: "Even camels are better provided for!"

My esteem for the culture of my native Continent and my belief in our white superiority was now rapidly vanishing as I watched these Italians herded, abused and starved by their officers. They were men without will, moulded into heroes by their Duce's sculptural genius, drilled to follow a flag and ask no questions.

I found the victims of these "conquerors" in the poorest disease-ridden section of the native quarter. These Abyssinian refugees were living in absolute poverty, always on the verge of starvation; large groups of them actually died for want of food. There was neither Nansen Office, Red Cross, nor any other humanitarian organization to care for them. Most of them wanted to sell themselves as slaves, but there were no buyers. Everything breathed the tragic aftermath of war. I wanted to escape from all this misery, to flee to a place which would not be a constant reminder of our shameful degradation.

My first choice was the British controlled port of Zeila, just a stone's-throw to the south, for I knew that the administration of British Somaliland kept peace in their country, despite efforts in London to upset it. The gentlemen of the Colonial Office had made some kind of agreement with the Italians for the use of the port of Zeila and of Berbera, the capital. There was talk of a macadam road to be built from Zeila to Harrar in Ethiopia. The Colonial Office concluded this agreement without consulting the local authorities, who showed their disapproval by sabotaging the whole plan. An Italian agent of a Torino tyre factory came all the way down from Italy to open up a branch of his firm in Zeila, but when he attempted to go

ashore the District Officer politely told him to go to hell or to Jibuti.

"But, signor," the Italian protested, "I have a visa from the British Passport Office in Rome valid for Somaliland."

"I suggest you ask them to return your money," replied the D.O.—and that was that. It was open defiance of the Colonial Office, but the Governor of British Somaliland knew what he was doing. He explained that he had to keep foreigners out so as not to upset the natives, and since consideration for the natives is always the strongest argument in British colonial policy there was no rebuke from London. The border was so tightly closed that my application was also refused by the Vice-Consul, who was sorry, but had his orders.

So I had to look to the north, to the land of the Danakils, a semi-independent state called Tajura. The tiny country was ruled by a Sultan famed throughout the three Somalilands as a brave warrior and as the best sandal-maker in the world. I went to the Governor's office for a permit, but the official just stared at me. "No, no, no, monsieur," he said, "you cannot go to Tajura. It is *trop dangereux*—why, we ourselves are not safe over there." Funny—this same Tajura is listed in the French Colonial Year-book as one of France's protectorates.

Only the narrow Gulf of Tajura, thirty-one miles wide, separates the land of the Danakils from Jibuti. Yet the French did not have the same success in civilizing Tajura, and it is no different today than it was when the enterprising Rochet d'Hericourt found it on June 1st, 1839. Colonial officials have an awesome respect for the savage habits of their protected ones, and shun the place; they even avoid the duty of an occasional visit for a superficial check-up to impress the Home Government. Administrators arriving in

Tajura were given so reserved a reception—to put it mildly—that they would quit the place with the speed of an antelope. Then they tried inviting the Sultan to come across the bay instead. Son Altesse arrived with an impressive entourage, most of them paddling their way across in primitive canoes. He was welcomed with the boom of seven saluting guns by a very dignified French Governor in full regalia, who escorted him to a palace especially rented and furnished for the royal visitor. When His Excellency showed the Sultan around the fine little palace he exclaimed with customary French courtesy:

“I beg Your Highness to consider this modest house your own.” This was promptly translated by the Sultan’s own interpreter: “The Ferenchi says this house belongs to you, Dardai.”

So the Sultan summoned local merchants and sold them the complete furnishings piece by piece. He even tried to get rid of the house, but met with a little trouble in the land-registry office. There His Highness found out that the property did not really belong to him, and so he felt that His Excellency the Governor had not told him the truth. The official in the land-registry had a hard time explaining this strange institution to the Sultan, but when he finally grasped it his mistrust of French civilization deepened considerably. Since then His Highness has visited Jibuti frequently, chiefly in the capacity of sandal manufacturer, but he was never again given a furnished palace.

Later the French officials decided on a still safer method of inspecting their protectorate. They just climbed up to the flat roof of the Governor’s palace and looked across the bay through a powerful telescope. Then they came downstairs and wrote long reports of their “tour of personal inspection” to send back home. To keep inquisitive visitors away, they made it a

closed military area, and cautioned envoys from the Home Government : "The Danakils are the cannibals of Africa. They hunt for men to mutilate, and white men are their favourites !"

The natives thought otherwise of their cousins. A Somali assured me they were handsome, hospitable, and shrewd, and mutilated only their enemies. I decided to test the savagery of the Danakils at any cost, and the next morning I was down in the native harbour bargaining with a Danakil "shipowner" to take me to Tajura. His price was five pounds of rancid butter, which I thought fair, and we came to terms. I spent the night on the tiny craft so that we could start before dawn the next morning and escape the vigilance of the authorities. I said *adieu* to converted Jibuti and sailed towards the strange land which was to give me the biggest thrill of my journey.

CHAPTER XVI

MARKET OF EUNUCHS

THE modern Charon who was to ferry me across this Acheron was himself a Danakil, an old man to whom sailing the sea was a sort of retirement. In his youth he had been a warrior, and had collected a number of weird barbarous trophies: the embalmed limbs of his enemies, which he had to bring back as proof of his bravery. His tattered headgear of black ostrich-feathers was another relic of his courage, since each feather represented a slain foe. He was an impressive fellow, six feet tall, slender and muscular. His dress was a solitary white linen blanket adorned with the legend, "Made in Japan—Dai Nippon". French colonial servants were afraid of the Danakils, but Japanese commercial travellers were not. They penetrated the closed area and sold blankets. Japanese goods were so cheap that it did not pay even Danakils to spend days at their primitive looms; this toga-like blanket became a sort of uniform, and the men human advertisements for Japan's commercial superiority.

The sailor was a Moslem, but did not bother to pray. He knew nothing of the laws of his religion and had never even seen the interior of a mosque. National customs are stronger than religious laws, and so the Arab religion means hardly anything to the Danakils. Lacking the polite charm of the Arabs, he made no attempt to play the host; in fact, he regarded me with unconcealed distrust and was taciturn throughout the

journey. His rudeness was at least honest ; the Danakils are not hypocrites.

We sailed six hours before Tajura came within range of the naked eye. The village was elongated, with its wigwam-shaped huts, built of branches, straw and mud spread along the coast. There were about two hundred of them, and at each end, standing like sentinels, two solidly built houses made of sea-shells held together by mud. On a gentle hill beyond was a small stone fort flying the French colours. The thought that the Frenchmen lurking in the safety of this stronghold would turn me back frightened me, but the old Danakil assured me that the fort was empty, and the flag tolerated only because the natives loved its gay colours.

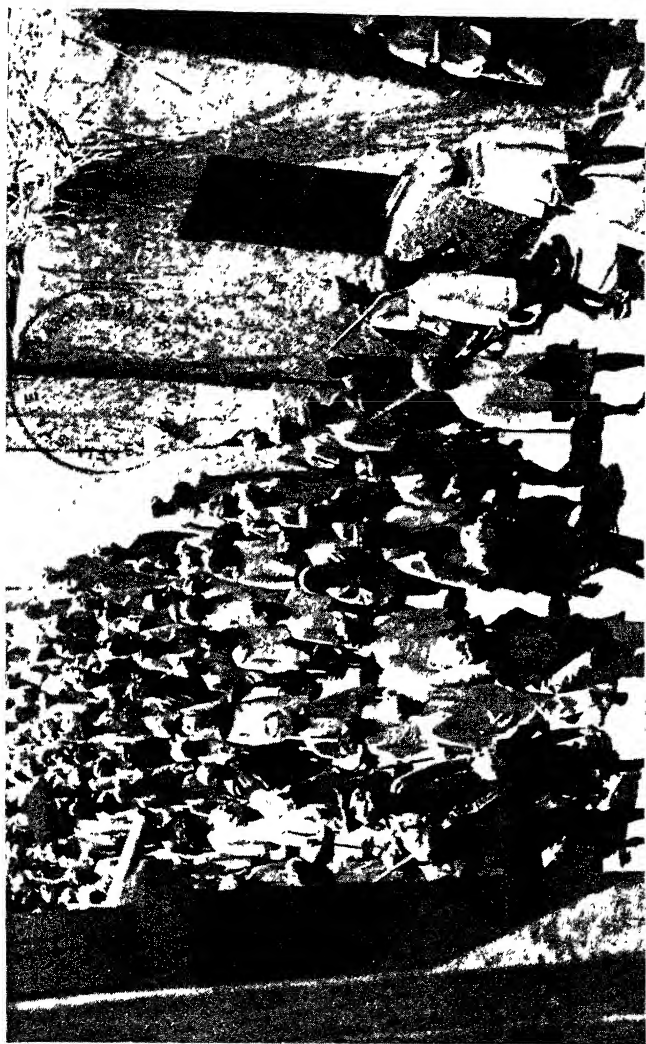
At first only children took notice of my unexpected arrival. They came down to the harbour in hordes and vociferously demanded *baksheesh*, a sure sign that some civilization had penetrated into Tajura. Their cries and shouts brought a few flabbergasted native women, and finally an aide of the Sultan, to find out what it was all about. When he saw me standing flinging French coins into the midst of the clamouring children he ran back to his master to report my arrival. There I stood, completely clothed, in a community of completely nude people ; the children wore absolutely nothing ; they looked like dusky little angels, well fed and healthy, with their little tummies standing out like small footballs of flesh. Both sexes were represented, but the girls were more skilful in extracting *baksheesh* ; they had that in common with their grown-up European sisters. The older girls wore somewhat more elaborate raiment : a dirty cloth round their loins, with the rest of their bodies uncovered. Some among them had strikingly beautiful figures, of ideal stature and perfect poise, and they would have been the delight of any French modiste. And there

were withered old witches with bodies like wrung-out lemons. One could tell the girls and the women by their different headdress. The sparkling sheen lent by daubs of rancid butter smeared over their hair could not make me forget the nauseous smell that came with it. The married women were reserved and silent, while the girls behaved in a conceited, provoking manner; their arch coquetry, enhanced by the alluring grace of their bodies, made them appear adorable. No wonder their men were mad about them!

Suddenly the law appeared—this time with the complete bodyguard of His Highness. Six giants with shaven heads under plenty of ostrich-feathers, and armed with multicoloured shields and spears, marched up to me. Their chief addressed me in his native tongue, a funny gibberish, a peculiar cocktail of all languages of the surrounding countries. I did not understand him, whereupon he took me for deaf, since he could not imagine that I would not know the tongue of the Danakils. So he began to shout at me. Now I was scared—I began to shout back in a gibberish of my own. This impressed him. He ceased his cross-examination and, taking me by the arm, led me through the village in the direction of one of the two houses.

His Highness the Sultan received me in the largest room of his house, where a native bedstead symbolized the customary throne. There was no other furniture in the room. The Sultan was the tallest of his tribe, which was probably why he was Sultan. His spear and shield were of pure silver with a narrow gold border—but I could discover not a feather on his head. Later, when I inquired about it, I was told that His Highness had slain so many foes that there was not enough room on his head to commemorate all his victims.

He was an amazing chap, smiling all over his face.





THE LAHEJ STATE BAND (NOTE THE SAXAPHONE)

Verily, His Highness was worthy of the high dignity he embodied, with so many extraordinary characteristics admired and feared by his tribe. He gazed at me, looking me up and down like a butcher his meat, and then shouted : "*Cadeau !*" In the excitement of the moment I did not expect a French word, so I continued staring at him, as he repeated with nervous impatience : "*Cadeau—cadeau—cadeau !*"

Now I understood ; he meant "gift"—the present I had brought him. I realized that although I had come with a maximum of determination I had brought a minimum of equipment, and had forgotten the most important of all—the customary token of my friendship. In the space of a moment I made an inventory of my belongings and decided my binoculars would be the only suitable gift. With a heavy heart I dug into my bag and handed them to His Highness, who laid them aside without even looking at them and continued shouting : "*Cadeau—cadeau—cadeau !*"

So I had to give him, one by one, a thermos flask, two shirts, a fan, and a very ornamental kimono. Finally he seemed content, and beckoned to his servant, who went into the next room and returned with a pair of sandals, hand-made by His Highness. With infinite grace the Sultan presented me with his own masterpiece, and I am sure there was more dignity in his offering of a pair of shoes than in my relinquishing half of my belongings. There was an interpreter at hand, with a total vocabulary of twenty French words. But they sufficed to inform me that I was the honoured guest of the Dardai, and would live in one of the houses which belonged to his minister, Benoita.

Escorted by the bodyguard, who looked on as I carried my considerably lightened luggage, I went to this house, a somewhat more elaborate hut than the others on the Main Square, furnished with a lone bedstead. When we had all crowded in, the chief of

the bodyguard stepped forward and, imitating his master, shouted at me : "*Cadeau—cadeau—cadeau !*"

Now I had to distribute what was left in my bags among the six stalwart gentlemen. I gave them socks, boots, pencils, notepaper, foreign stamps—everything I had ; and although all these things were valuable to me they were not impressed, and left rather disappointed. But, at any rate, they left. I was not familiar with my rights and duties in Tajura : was I permitted to leave the hut and go strolling in the village, or was I a prisoner of His Highness ?

But soon Manassir appeared to enlighten me. He was born twenty-five years ago, in Berbera, British Somaliland, and before settling in Tajura he had been round the world twice as stoker on a Dollar Line boat. He had spent months in London, a year in New York, and spoke English fluently ; his speciality was to imitate the Kilburn Cockney and the East Side New Yorker. "Too much going round the world makes you sick," he said when he told me the story of his life, "and in New York I caught myself homesick for Berbera. I guess I was a damned fool, but now it's too late and I have to take whatever job I can get."

He never told me, but I believe he was guilty of some mischief at home, and had had to flee to where the police could not find him. He was Tajura's sole intellectual, and the only man who wore anything remotely resembling European clothes. Manassir was a fine-looking chap, bubbling with health, and had a sense of humour. He came to offer me his services in the hope of making a few extra coins. Otherwise he worked in the port as general handyman. I was glad to have him around, and began making plans with him. Manassir, however, was somewhat pessimistic about it all. "You have chosen a bad time for your visit," he said. "The Sultan is angry that you

have come. Tomorrow the market begins, and he does not like foreigners looking into his business."

"What market?" I asked.

"The market of the eunuchs."

Of the one thousand inhabitants of Tajura there are approximately three hundred and fifty males, four hundred females, and two hundred and fifty who belong to neither of the sexes. They are the victims of a savage custom, centuries old, and still practised all over the land of the Danakils. It is the unwritten law of this barbarous tribe that no man can take into marriage a woman before he has mutilated at least three of his enemies. He must cut off the genitals of his victims and produce these cruel trophies as proof of his courage and worthiness when he goes to the hut of his prospective in-laws to ask for his bride. When there is war in the desert the three trophies can be obtained in a jiffy on the savage battlefields. But in times of peace the love-sick Danakils slay and mutilate one another, only to obtain the longed-for prize. When a young man comes of marriageable age, and has insufficient proof of his bravery, he ambushes men of his own tribe and kills them with a well-aimed spear dipped into the milky poison of the cactus, the deadly desert's sole vegetation. Sometimes the powerful constitution of these fine warriors withstands both the spear-wound and the mutilation. Their relatives pour boiling oil on them and bring the men back to life—but an unhappy fate awaits them. An Arab saying insists: "To be a eunuch is worse than to be dead." In Tajura these mutilated unfortunates are despised and outcast; no decent person stops to talk with them, and the girls mock these pariahs with proposals that make their blood boil.

This savage custom—it has made Tajura feared and famed in all the Red Sea countries—is a source of income to the natives. The village has become

the headquarters of the eunuch trade. Castratos are "employed" as the husbands' watch-dogs in the Indian courts of Moslem princes and in the harems of Arabia, while in Mecca they have exalted positions as keepers of the secret Kaaba, the Tent of the Black Stone. Male and female pilgrims enter the Kaaba together and the women bare their faces in the presence of the holy symbol. The *agas*, as the eunuchs are called, see to it that the men are not lured by the sinful looks in the women's eyes and that they do not soil the sanctity of the holy place by committing an improper act. The *agas* were first brought to Mecca by Abu Jafar, the Caliph who ruled from A.H. 130-158, and this institution has been maintained for eleven hundred years by pious contributions from all over the Moslem world. The head *aga* uses the money given by religious donors to replenish this army of "Allah's slaves" in Tajura.

The annual market is the eunuch's only hope of improving his tragic lot. In their new homes these outcasts become respected members of the community. They are slaves, yet they enjoy all the comforts and privileges the households of their masters can offer; they are spoiled by both wives and husbands, since the peace of the harem often depends upon the eunuch! The *agas* of Mecca are even better off; they are said to be the wealthiest of Mecca's inhabitants. They live in palatial houses and surround themselves with worldly pleasures to forget the one denied them. These slaves are permitted to keep slaves themselves, and some of them even maintain extensive harems of legal wives and scores of dusky concubines. Sometimes, just to show off, or driven by a yearning for children, they buy pregnant women, paying exorbitant prices to the husbands for the divorce and celebrate the births as if they were their own children. The *agas* of the Kaaba are the fondest fathers in the

whole of Arabia, and bring "their children" up with the greatest love and care ; while they are humble slaves of their own wives, they look upon all other women with disdain.

In the morning hundreds of these wretches were herded into the square in front of the mosque, and soon the auction began. Among the buyers were the head *aga* from Mecca, representatives of several Indian potentates, including envoys of the Nizam of Hyderabad, as well as legions of speculators who came to buy eunuchs for resale at a handsome profit across the sea in Arabia. The honourable head *aga* from Mecca was interested only in boys, the younger the better, to educate for their exalted offices. The buyers from India were looking for good-looking, handsome men—an ugly face disfigures the beauty of the harem. The human merchandise, anxious to get away from this place of humiliation, clamoured and cried and shouted, loudly advertising their advantages, their virtues and abilities, to attract customers. The bargaining was done with all the cunning of Orientals, and it went on well past mid-day. Those bought were immediately taken down to the harbour crowded with foreign dhows, while the rest continued their clamouring, which became a wailing lamentation when the last buyer left. The unsold ones were left to face another painful year of hope and despair.

In almost every house there had been a eunuch for sale, and they had all brought good prices. Fathers had sold their mutilated sons, merchants their slaves and warriors their captives. Now they were making whoopee. The market changed into a gay fair, salesmen and buyers celebrating their deals. Girls danced in front of spits where whole oxen were being barbecued while troubadours sang improvised sonnets. Nude tribesmen of the interior, enticed to Tajura by

the frolicsome mood, performed wild war-dances, inflicting painful injuries on one another. To the steady beat of tom-toms Tajura was gradually sinking into a turmoil of savage passion.

I found myself in the midst of a ferocious, maddened crowd kept in bounds by the Sultan's policemen. Youthful warriors approached me with menacing gestures, pointing their spears at me and brandishing their knives. Whenever a knife ventured close to my face I instinctively ducked, which brought a roar of laughter as reward to the daring warrior. I tried to escape the crowd, but everywhere I went I ran into prancing, yelling blackamoors. I dodged in and out of streets until I found myself in front of a mosque. I remembered to take my shoes off before invading the house of Allah for sanctuary. It was deserted except for one single worshipper, the Imam himself. It was Friday, the holy day, yet no one had come to prayer, and the poor priest stood there praying for the whole mad community.

I found refuge in the cool tranquillity of the mosque, and here Manassir found me the next morning, meditating on the clever French officials who prefer to see Tajura through their telescopes. This civilized son of Africa was full of sympathy. "You cannot stay here for ever," he said. "Better go to the Sultan and place yourself under his protection."

When we entered His Highness's house we found him excited and intoxicated, for his share in each eunuch sold had swelled his ebbing treasury by several thousand riyals. He pretended he was sober, but did not succeed very well. Between frequent hiccups he invited me to stay with him for the day and promised me a heavy guard for the night. Whereupon Manassir became still more worried, and whispered: "If you get away unmutilated it will be a

miracle. Remember, one white man counts for three natives !”

Outside the tom-toms were beating a steady crescendo as the girls shrieked in insane ecstasy as they whirled in the sand. I pressed the palms of my hands over my ears to keep out the cruel noise, but nothing helped. This African fantasia was driving me mad. After sunset the Sultan’s bodyguard escorted me back to my hut, and two men were left outside the door to guard me. Manassir, still pessimistic, remained with me. “You must not trust these men outside,” he said; “all the Danakils are snakes. Subdue your drowsiness and stay up the whole night. And here is a knife for your protection. You can never tell. . . .”

During the night groups came to the hut and sang humiliating serenades. Through my peephole I saw, in the light of numerous bonfires, my own bodyguard conducting the cruel choir. I was frantic; I kept looking at my watch every five minutes; time seemed to stand still; the redeeming dawn would not come.

This sleepless night of horror was followed by a third day of celebrations which by now had attained almost religious fervour. Not a single person in the village was sober, and the Sultan was the drunkest of them all. When I went to see him he opened his eyes, beckoned to his men, and these drunken warriors promptly seized me and pushed me back to my hut. Manassir followed with an enigmatic message from His Highness: “You must not leave the hut until he sends for you. And do not try to escape, he says !”

“What is this ?” I asked. “Am I his prisoner ?”

“Who knows ?” mused Manassir. “Perhaps it is only to protect you against his excited subjects. But perhaps he is anxious to get a new trophy, and you’ll have to supply it.”

Hours passed . . . nobody came. At last, in the late afternoon, I heard coherent words outside my door. My name was mentioned, and I heard a man struggling with my guards. Suddenly a hoarse voice cried out: "Sahib! Oh, sahib!" I leapt from the hard bed on which I had been tossing for hours, rushed to the low door, and in the twilight I saw my old nachoda. The guards were trying to push him away, but he finally forced his way into the house. Manassir was with him; he had shown him the way. . . . Manassir was a real friend.

"Allah be praised that you are well, sahib!" the old nachoda greeted me. "But now hurry, the *Lucky* is waiting in the bay!" I grabbed my belongings and we tried to leave the hut, but the guards crossed their spears and blocked the way out. They shouted at Manassir: "Do you want to defy the orders of the Dardai? Don't you know that he ordered the Ferenchi to stay with us? Go on, help him, and you'll die with him the death of a dog!"

There was nothing left but to send Manassir with a very humble message to His Highness, begging for my immediate release. Manassir returned empty-handed:

"The Sultan is drunk and asleep like a sandbag. You'll have to wait until he sleeps off his fuddle!"

"Let's pray that he has a short sleep," the nachoda murmured.

Then he returned to the dhow to await what the dawn might bring.

Shortly after sunrise the burly bodyguard of the Sultan marched up to my hut in full force, looking slightly seedy from the wear of the celebration. Without uttering a single word the headman took my arm and led me down to the harbour under an escort of spears, shields and plumes, just as on my arrival four days before. Manassir was nowhere

about, but the nachoda was waiting. The headman tried a gentler form of gibberish on him. He understood enough to translate: "He says, sahib, that Dardai says go FerENCHI!"—and I shall probably never know whether my manhood had really been spared by the sandal-making Sultan of the trophy-loving Danakils.

CHAPTER XVII

HASSAN VERSUS ITALY

A CURIOUS drama of nature accompanied my departure from Tajura, a symbolic finale to the experiences of the past few days. It was a dim, dull day, and there was a peculiar mist in the stuffy air. Yesterday's pleasant breeze was rapidly growing into a minor gale, and the Danakil desert's sand whirled like myriads of tiny flies. The sun went hiding behind an opaque screen of mischievous clouds rushing in frenzied circles like figures on a merry-go-round. The wind whipped the waters into foaming fury, and the little canoe waiting to take us out to the *Lucky* looked like an empty nutshell. The old nachoda sighed with relief when the bodyguard left, but cast worried glances at the angry sky. He turned to me :

"Now it's up to you. Would you rather stay a while longer with these godless savages or risk a perilous crossing on a furious sea?"

I decided for the sea, and so began a struggle with the elements. We paddled desperately to the dhow, and then, wet through to our skins, we all gave a hand to set the sails in the mounting storm. The helmsmen chanted a strange, monotonous tune as we tugged at the ropes. The wind filled the sails and with a violent jerk the boat started on her course out of the bay. Soon the sun was shining once more and a fresh breeze chased the dhow at a steady eight knots an hour.

Perim, a British island in the mouth of Bab-el-

Mandeb, about a hundred miles east of Tajura, was our next port of call. Way back in 1886 a former political officer of the Aden administration, Lieutenant (later Sir) R. L. Playfair, said of Perim: "She stands like a sentinel at the mouth of the Red Sea." He added: "A mere barren rock, it is true, but one which possesses the singular value of being so distinctly in its right place that we cannot contemplate with equanimity the possibility of its being in any hands but our own." Controlling the Suez Canal and Perim, Britain has a strategical position in the Red Sea similar to that existing in the Mediterranean, where she holds Gibraltar. Thus Britain holds the keys to entrance and exit both in the Mediterranean and in the Red Sea, and no one could pass in or out should she wish to block the way.

The island's strategical importance was recognized early in history. It was here that a Persian army established its base of operations in A.D. 573, when it came down to recover the Yemen from Ethiopian usurpers. The island was then called Mayoon. A Persian poet wrote:

At Mayoon a thousand warriors landed armed with shields.
They were of the race of Sassan and Mahrejan;
They came to expel the blacks from Yemen,
Guided by a Prince of the race of Shoo Jadán.

In 1738 the French also, during a campaign against the Yemen, landed troops in the same place. Sixty years later, on May 5th, a small British force took formal possession of the island, but abandoned it four months later for want of drinking-water. For half a century the handful of Arab fishermen on the island were left in peace by the Imperialistic European Powers, until a French political agent, Monsieur Henri Lambert, returning to Aden from Tajura, where he had just concluded a treaty with the Danakil Sultan

Abu Beker, landed there. Lambert was a political traveller in search of new possessions for the growing overseas power of his country. In Perim he saw the vantage-point for controlling the unruly Danakils across the water, and sent an urgent report to Paris asking for the dispatch of a warship to take formal possession. The French were quick in their decision, and soon a warship was on her way, sailing round the Horn. After a tiresome journey the French man-o'-war called at Aden to spend the night preceding the occupation, and the commandant and his officers went ashore to pay a courtesy call on Aden's Political Resident, General Coghlin.

The talkative Frenchman was careless enough to tell General Coghlin everything, and the Britishers, who until now had not given a thought to Perim, suddenly discovered its vital importance. "The French must not get it!" was the decision of the Aden Residency.

Quickly a festive party was arranged in honour of the French guests, and while the gallant French officers were being lavishly wined and dined a British warship left Aden with orders to sail to Perim under full steam and hoist the Union Jack ahead of the French Tricolour.

A small landing-party under the command of Lieutenant Templar carried out the orders with military precision, and when the French man-o'-war dropped anchor twenty-four hours later Monsieur le Commandant was amazed to find a British warship in the harbour and the Union Jack waving from a newly erected flagpole on the highest peak of the island.

This is the account of how the British took Perim in January 1857, which I found in contemporary Paris newspapers, whose editorial pages raged against what they termed "the perfidious Albion's

double-crossing tricks". To the passionate attacks, no doubt inspired by French Government circles, the British took no exception, nor did they dignify them with a reply. Although the French have held to this account of Perim's occupation, it seems it would not have been necessary for Britain to have used such a last-minute device, because the Union Jack had been formally hoisted in Perim fifty-nine years before Monsieur Lambert discovered the island, and besides arrangements for a reoccupation were already under way when Lambert first began his wanderings down south.

I found that the story of the romantic occupation in official British documents presented a less adventurous light. It was merely a routine step up on the stairway leading to territorial expansion that marked the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign. But it was emphasized in these same documents that by occupying Perim Britain did not intend to menace that part of the world of which Perim was a sort of cornerstone. When General Coghlin wrote to his superior, the Governor of Bombay, Lord Elphinstone, about the necessity of reoccupying the island, the Governor wrote back :

We do not think of making a Cronstadt in the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb ; all we want is to prevent any other nation from making one.

He passed General Coghlin's urgent suggestion on to the Secret Committee in London for consideration. The reply was an order endorsing Coghlin's plans. A routine order was given Lieutenant Templar, who carried it out with no French warships following on his heels.

We had been sailing for several hours when I noticed that instead of being on a north-easterly

course we were heading directly east towards Aden. I rushed to the nachoda and stormed :

"What's the matter with you? Aren't you sailing to Perim?"

"We are, sahib," he said calmly, "but we were blown off our course." He explained that it was not the wind that had forced him to deviate, but an Italian military outpost at the northern end of the Gulf of Tajura and right in the mouth of the Bab-el-Mandeb. This outpost was established just three years ago, on a group of six rocky islets called the Jezirat Sowabih (the Brothers), which the then French Premier, Pierre Laval, ceded to Signor Mussolini in February 1935. Although eighty years ago Britain was opposed to any country making a "Cronstadt in the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb", now she just looked on while Italy was doing it, for the newly acquired islets were promptly fortified by Italy, and soon the neglected French rocks became veritable strongholds.

The north-eastern islet, the largest, has an excellent safe harbour on its northern coast. Here they mounted heavy guns with a detachment of askaris keeping constant watch. On the other five islets, too small for a garrison, sentries were posted. Then she closed the channel between the coast and the islets and prohibited shipping in a three-mile zone. This was a heavy blow to the many dhows sailing north from the British possessions in the south. The prohibition, acknowledged by the British Admiralty, was printed in the daily bulletins ; but, unfortunately, the skippers of these native sailing ships never read bulletins. Soon Italy's action resulted in a painful incident, when a dhow sailing north from British Somaliland on the usual course close to the Brothers was fired at and members of her crew, including the nachoda, killed.

Thus Italy began her interference with British shipping long before the trouble in Spain, since the

Somali crew of the dhow were protected subjects of His Britannic Majesty. The incident was reported to Aden, and a mild protest lodged in Rome, with an even milder apology following. The shots fired from the Brothers paralysed native shipping in the western channel of the straits; the dhows had to use the smaller eastern channel close to the Arabian coast, a dangerous passage because of the many changing currents.

I wanted to sail through the prohibited channel, and using a ruse, I asked the crew: "Do you agree with Italy's closing of the passage?" They all replied in the negative, so I went on inciting: "Well, then, why don't we defy these regulations?"

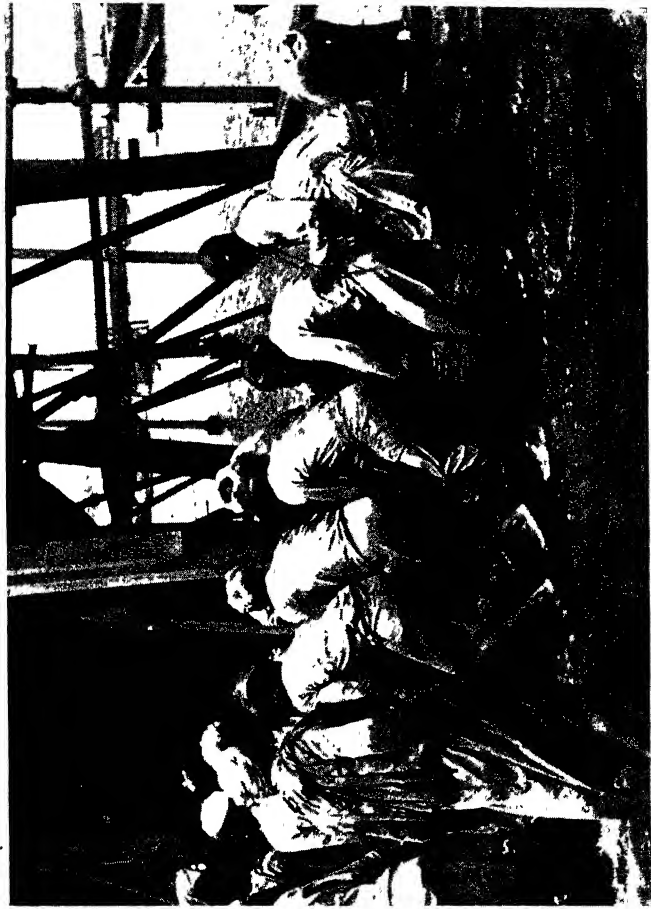
Wallah—they were ready! We turned sharp north, and in a few hours the Brothers were within range of our vision. The fresh breeze was driving the *Lucky* at a good speed, and the crew gathered around me to prepare for the excitement. From the sacks of cereal, consigned to Sheikh Said, we made a kind of barricade to duck behind should the Italians resort to shooting. We were still outside the range of rifles when, by straining our eyes, we noticed the sentry on the southernmost islet standing on a plateau. When he discovered our little boat sailing straight into the forbidden waters he fired a warning shot. We could clearly see the smoke of his rifle, but the wind carried the sound off. Now we saw all the askaris, armed to the teeth, gather on the plateaux of the other islets. They aimed machine-guns from the largest of the Brothers, and their commanding officer, in white linen uniform, returned through his binoculars the attention I was bestowing on him through the nachoda's.

In no time we were abreast of the first islet, moving fast towards the zigzag of the others. It was an exciting game waiting for the fusillade. Would the shots sink the *Lucky* and leave us to the sharks or

would the famed poor marksmanship of the askaris be our salvation? By now we were in the channel between the Brothers, but there was still no firing from the largest of the islets. The nachoda shouted sharp commands, the position of the sails was changed, and the boat came about sharply to the east. In a few minutes we had passed out of the range of the rifles; they did not fire after us with heavy guns. We considered our safe passage a kind of reward for our pluck; later, however, I heard from a capitano on one of the Red Sea patrol ships, who had heard of our daring, that we had been saved by the speed of our dhow. In fact, it was faster than the Italian officer's mind: by the time he had decided what to do we were no longer a target for his sharpshooters.

What Britain had never even intended to do the Italians had actually accomplished: they had made a miniature Cronstadt in the Bab-el-Mandeb. I was anxious to see if the British reply to the Italian challenge lay in Perim. I even feared it might have been declared a military area and that I might not be permitted to land because of the menace of Italian guns. But when we arrived in Perim Bay an hour later there was no one either to greet us or to keep us out.

British policy on Perim had varied with the individual views of Aden's political residents. One of them had erected a lighthouse on the island's highest peak to help shipping in the straits, while another had leased the entire island to a private enterprise known as the Perim Coal Company. The Aden administration has completely ignored Perim ever since the coal company abandoned its entire plant there. On the shore we saw the bungalows, a heap of scrap-iron, two or three silvery oil-tanks, the building of a power station, and in the distance the whitewashed tower of the light—but not a sign of a human being, not even a



UNLOADING TIMBER AT THE DHOW-YARD



PURCHASING WOOD FOR DIJOW-MAKING

single goat. The wind blew through the windows of the bungalows, now opening, now shutting them.

We went ashore. The bungalows were completely furnished; posted on the bulletin-board of the administration building were orders signed by the manager, and in the community lounge was a perfect billiard-table, with cues hanging from the wall; even the chinks were still there. It seemed as though the inhabitants had just left for a stroll on the seashore and might return at any moment. But nobody came.

All white men had left a few months before when the entire personnel of the Perim Coal Company had been withdrawn; with them went Perim's only armed force, a small company of Aden policemen. According to the natives who live on the other side of the island, the police force had brought crime to Perim. Lieutenant Lawrence, commandant of the Perim detachment of the Yemen Infantry, was killed by one of his men while sleeping on the terrace of his bungalow. The murderer escaped with his strong-box, and was never found. One Arab legend made a hero of this killer: it said he swam across to the Arabian shore braving the sharks of the channel, bought arms and munitions and recruited a company of freebooters. He became a pirate, preying on shipping along the Lower Yemen coast, but he distributed all of the booty among the poor, a true Arabian Robin Hood. Another story relates how, when trying to escape by swimming, he was caught by a shark, and now both he and the unopened box are peacefully at rest in the stomach of the beast. The spirit of Lieutenant Lawrence was the only "living soul of a white man" left on Perim. It haunts his bungalow at midnight, spying across the water to Arabia, in the vain hope of seeing his killer. Lawrence's ghost has driven all the natives from this southern section of Perim to the north end beyond a few gentle rocky hills. Sometimes

in daylight they venture down to the bay, but no power can induce them to come after sundown.

One of the neatly laid-out walks led to a couple of tennis courts, a cricket and a hockey ground, and there was even a nine-hole golf course laid out on the rocks. The winding streets took us to the bungalow of the Eastern Telegraph Company, an empty building where hundreds of telegrams were scattered all over the floor. I threw myself on this bunch of telegrams in the hope of finding some official secrets, and there they were, signed by wing commanders, lieutenant-colonels, and vice-admirals, all stationed at Aden during the Italo-Ethiopian campaign. One read :

Made arrangements for hockey match for Tuesday, wire if your team able to compete.

Another :

Could you attend dinner on Saturday ?

And the third :

Missed MCC Australia result Friday. Please wire scores.

I went through all the telegrams ; there were more than three hundred, but the only secret I was able to discover was that the fiancée of one of the Perim officials had cancelled her engagement.

So here I was, within the range of heavy Italian guns, turned towards the British Perim, and those against whom they were aimed at replied by evacuating it and making it an empty target. I was amazed, profoundly amazed, watching this silent British demonstration. And since only a few hours ago I was myself menaced by the armed might of the Italians I

was not quite sure whether dignified ignoring of the foe is always the right weapon.

I was in complete possession of the island, and if I wished I could have hoisted my flag, too, this time outwitting the British. It was a grand experience, alone on a whole island, running up and down the walks, climbing rocks, dashing from one bungalow to another, playing a game of billiards all by myself, like a child at large. I was devoting all my attention to getting a red ball into the billiard-table's pocket when the door of the canteen opened and in came a tall, dusky gentleman, dressed in the khaki uniform of the Aden police. I felt like Robinson Crusoe looking at his Man Friday at their first meeting.

The policeman was smiling; he had not come to deport me; on the contrary, he had come to show me around. His name was Hassan, a sergeant, the one and only policeman left behind to keep law and order among the few hundred native inhabitants. In his little house, which had been elevated to headquarters of the Perim Force, he cherished the only rifle to be found on the island. But he admitted that so far he had had no occasion to fire a single shot. His position had dignity and was even made dramatic by his solitude.

Fortified rocks on the Italian side: with cannons, machine-guns, and closed areas; here, Hassan with his single rifle. Verily, it was an uneven competition.

But when I bade good-bye to this lone sentinel I somehow felt that in this situation of Hassan versus Italy Hassan was by far the superior.

CHAPTER XVIII

SLAVERY UP TO DATE

SOMETHING seemed not quite in order on the *Lucky*. There were seventeen men aboard, quite a crew for the tiny boat, but only a couple of them lending a hand to the sails. The others were sitting around the kitchen fire, their heads together as if secretly plotting; from time to time they threw stealthy looks in my direction. Was it mutiny they were plotting? Was the *Lucky* a vessel of the Red Sea buccaneers? I recalled my friends in Aden had warned me that pirate dhows were still sailing under the old black flag, menacing life and property.

Casually I strolled over to the men in the hope of catching fragments of their conversation; but as soon as they noticed me they stopped talking. This confirmed my fear that these men were up to something. What if they should throw me overboard? Sergeant Hassan of the Perim "police force" was the law's sole representative in the Red Sea, but I was sailing out of his jurisdiction without even a firearm to protect myself.

As we came closer to Sheikh Said the conference suddenly ended and the men began to pack their belongings. They took clean shirts from their bundles and put them over their dirty ones. One of them, who seemed to be their leader, produced the complete uniform of an Aden policeman and donned it while the others looked on in admiration. As soon as the

policeman was properly dressed for the occasion they all stood up and came over to me in ceremonious deputation. Mahmud, the Aden bobby, made a formal address: "Sahib," he said, "we thank you from the depths of our hearts for your generosity in taking us along, but at Sheikh Said our paths must part, and therefore the time has come to bid you farewell."

"But what's wrong, Mahmud?" I asked him in astonishment. "Don't you like me, or am I not paying you enough? Now, come, let's talk sense. What's your grievance?"

Mahmud protested: "We have none, O sahib, and we do like you very much. But over there"—and he pointed to the tiny village already clearly visible on the Arabian shore—"over there is our journey's end."

I was still puzzled, and turned to the old nachoda, who was squatting on his bridge in heavenly indifference. "Nachoda, hey," I yelled; "what's all this about?"

Slowly he came down, and in an impassive voice explained: "I should have told you that these men do not belong to the crew. My men are over there: Omar, Saif, Hassan and Ali. These here came to me in Aden and begged me to take them as far as Sheikh Said because they had no money to pay for their passage." My silly fears melted into smiling sympathy; so these men whom I took to be pirates were just plain Red Sea hitch-hikers. The nachoda did not guess my reaction, and said: "I hope you're not angry?"

"Oh, not a bit," I beamed; "it was a good deed, nachoda. Are they all from the Yemen?"

"No, sahib, we come from all over Arabia," one of the men replied.

"Well, then, why on earth are you going to the Yemen?"

There was a deep silence, which made me feel my casual question was an important one. My own boy,

Farouk (Farago), was among those who were leaving, so I turned to him : "How about you, Farouk ? You are from the Hadhramauth ! What brings you to the Yemen ?"

He bowed his head ; then suddenly looking me straight in the eye, he said, with disgust in his voice :

"The Yemen ? What is there for us to do in the Yemen ? Do you think this wretched country could offer us work and profit ? Yes, *work and profit*, that's what we are looking for. Across the water, in Eritrea, in Ethiopia, in Somalia, the Italians need able-bodied men to help them build their roads and erect their houses. Their agents came to us and mocked us for working for so little while the Italians pay so much. We are no fools, sahib. We know what we are doing. We are going to Massawa for a better life, and soon we shall return to our children with heaps of money : carefree, wealthy men."

Their explanation saddened me, for I knew more than these men did about the work going on in Eritrea. By ruthless exploitation of labour Italy had turned her colonies into a gigantic sweat-shop with conditions similar to those which prevailed when the Pharaohs built the Pyramids. Indeed, Farouk was right : Italy needed able-bodied men badly. Engineers had been sent from home to build roads from Assab to Dessye across the Danakil desert, and from Asmara to Addis Ababa through the northern mountains. They were to have been the best roads Africa has seen since the Romans left two thousand years ago. But she was unable to procure enough native privates for her labour brigade in a land where labour is usually abundant, and probably the cheapest on earth. The natives hid in the mountains, or went wandering in the desert, partly in organized passive resistance and partly because they were lazy by nature and hated the idea of regular work. Neither gentle promises nor

menacing threats could bring them back ; Italy was forced to import labourers from home, and to recruit help in the adjacent countries.

Soon all roads in Arabia were leading to this African branch of Rome ; there was a migration of thousands of Arab workers from Aden, the Yemen, the Hadhramauth, Oman, Muscat, Bahrein and Kuweit, lured to Eritrea by Italian agents. Before long there was a shortage of labour in the Arabian countries, and the problem became so acute that the Aden Government had to step in. Strict orders were issued prohibiting native labourers from leaving the territory of the protectorate. The steamship companies were instructed to refuse passage to anyone unable to prove a satisfactory destination.

Within a few months men returning from the Italian possessions unwittingly came to the aid of the Government. They told of hardships and suffering, of starvation and floggings, of how the Italian foreman laughed when they demanded the high wages promised by the agent, and how, when they wanted to go home, guards were posted at their huts threatening to shoot to kill anyone trying to escape.

Yet a few managed to escape and were telling their sad story in the coffee-shops and the bazaar. But nobody would listen ; they preferred to believe the Italians' pictures of a land flowing with milk and honey rather than the stories of their own countrymen ; nothing could keep them in Aden. When they were barred from the sea they trekked to the north, to the Yemen, where there was no prohibition, and whence the way to the Italian possessions was easy.

These men of mine had been more ingenious. When they heard of my trip they bribed the nachoda to sign them on as members of the crew, and since dhows often sail with as many as thirty sailors aboard it did not strike the Aden police as unusual when

seventeen sailors were listed on my nachoda's report. So, with Government sanction and my unwitting help, they were on their way to become helpers of Italian imperialism. It was too late to do anything about it now, so I shook hands with the departing stowaways and wished them luck. They were deeply moved, and some of them even had tears in their eyes as they fell to their knees and kissed my hand.

They were a mixed company: Mahmud, an intelligent, quick-witted young Arab, had deserted from the Aden police; Abdu, a half-wit from Muscat, had been the most industrious throughout the voyage and had done the work of most of the men; Ali was a pitch-black negro whose father was a slave, and whose grandfather, less than a hundred years ago, had been brought across the very same waters upon which the grandson was now returning into civilized slavery. And the adventurous son of the Lower Yafai sultan was just another tramp among them, enjoying no privileges in this typically Arab democracy.

As we sailed into the bay at Sheikh Said another dhow flying a huge green-white-red Italian flag came alongside and its crew of askaris immediately took my men into custody. They stood on deck waving to me as she headed for the open sea. As they disappeared beyond the bend of the horizon I marvelled at the efficiency with which the Italian agents in Aden had manœuvred the machinery of this modern slave trade.

Such open sponsorship of "civilized slavery" does not exclude Italy as a member of the International Anti-Slavery Convention. She continues to maintain two gunboats which, together with English and French sloops, form the Red Sea Patrol, which police the waters for suspicious dhows engaging in the regular slave trade. In the Red Sea slave-trading had always been considered an honourable and profitable busi-

ness ; in the Sudan, in the Somalilands, and particularly in Abyssinia, where slaves were not only household servants but merchandise for Arabian buyers as well, it was the main source of income. Slave-traders waxed wealthy on their human wares, and the people of Suakin, chief slave-trading port of the Sudan, used to boast : "We do not need to harvest ; our crops are the slaves"—just as the pious pilgrims are the crops of the people of Mecca.

To be a slave was an occupation. In the Near East it was considered a trade, like a joiner or a shoemaker, without the thought of horror attributed to it by Europeans and Americans. Slaves were employed : they were used on farms, in households and in offices, and were not thought of as down-trodden pariahs. In fact, they were of higher rank than ordinary servants, generations having been nursed in the masters' households ; it was not uncommon for a slave-owner to marry the daughter of one of his slaves, her father remaining in bondage. Slaves were paid no wages, but were fed, clothed and sheltered. They were considered assets and had to remain as long as their masters wanted them, or could be disposed of when he tired of their faces or needed money.

Slavery was a highly respected institution : traders, masters and slaves were perfectly content ; business boomed, dhows plied between the African and Arabian coasts, gold was plentiful, and life was just fine. In Sheikh Said an old man, reminiscing on the bedimmed memories of those days, said : "It was Paradise on earth, sahib, but the good old days are gone for ever." He was longing for those "good old days", even though he had been a slave himself.

Shortly after they occupied Aden the British started a crusade against trading in human goods. Learning that traders frequented ports owned and

“operated” by the Oulaki tribe, the Aden administration’s first efforts were directed towards the chiefs and elders of this tribe. Political officers induced the native chiefs to sign a document in which they declared their willingness to co-operate in abolishing slavery. It read :

Influenced by motives of humanity and by a desire to conform, we lend a willing ear to the proposals of our sincere friend, Brigadier William Marcus Coghlin, Political Resident in Aden, that we should covenant with him and with each other to abolish and prohibit the exportation of slaves from any one part of Africa to any other place in Africa, or Asia, or elsewhere under our authority. We whose names and seals are set to this bond do therefore, in the sight of God and man, solemnly proclaim our intention to prohibit the exportation of slaves from Africa by every means in our power ; we will export none ourselves, nor permit our subjects to do so ; and any vessel found carrying slaves shall be seized and confiscated, and the slaves shall be released.

This treaty was concluded in 1856 by Manassir bin Boo Beker (Aby Beker), Sultan of the Oulaki tribe and the chiefs of his tribe, and the elders of six ports on the African coast : Mait, Hais, Rakoda, Unkor, Kurrem and Ain Tarod. It remains a humane document, indeed, even though slavery did continue unabated. More powerful chiefs than those who put the print of their thumbs as royal seal on the document refused to give up their profits on slaves. The several independent petty kings of the various Ethiopian regions and the Sudan’s tribal chiefs were the real factors in slave-trading. One of these chiefs, Zulbeqar Pasha, powerful in his own territories and influential even at the Cairo Court of the Khedive of Egypt and at the Sublime Porte, the two Governments which nominally ruled these territories by remote control, was virtually the uncrowned king of the Sudan. When the Egyptians, urged by Britain,

tried to interfere with his business he established a huge army to "protect his legitimate interests" and succeeded in dealing a severe blow to the Khedive's forces which had been sent out against him.

Although the British campaign did result in a minor slump in the slave market, slavery was continued until 1923, when two important African events accelerated England's success. The Sudan was taken over by the London Foreign Office, and the corrupt, graft-ridden Egyptian administration replaced by English authority, which freed all slaves, prohibited trading, and ruthlessly prosecuted those who attempted to defy the new laws. It was during this time that Haile Selassie had gained absolute control over the many rebellious chiefs of Ethiopia, and had decided to join the company of civilized powers by requesting admission to the League of Nations. England opposed Haile Selassie, with the British delegate arguing that Abyssinia was the biggest obstacle in cleaning the Red Sea of slaves. And so Geneva, forthwith, made the abolition of slavery the primary condition of Ethiopia's admission. The Red Sea Patrol was intensified, and with patient educational work the British succeeded in convincing the natives of the evils of the antiquated system of slavery.

But just when the native princes were agreeing to abolish slavery, low-minded European adventurers were invading Africa to take up where the natives had left off. I know two of them, a Frenchman and a German, who, managing to evade the vigilance of the now allied European and native opposition, supply endless quantities of slaves for the still-existing Arabian market. The Frenchman made Addis Ababa his headquarters until he was thrown out by Haile Selassie. He then transferred his activities to French Somaliland, but his own countrymen were delighted when the Italian campaign against Ethiopia started and he left

to join the war. His assignments were "dirty work", and since the war he has been recruiting so-called labourers for his employers, virtually continuing his original trade.

The German gave up a high Government post in Berlin for his nefarious business. He avoided towns and set up headquarters on an island in Lake Tana, in Northern Abyssinia, specializing in boys and girls. Herr G. operated his business in the shade of a screen made of papyrus trees, and under the protection of mighty Abyssinian provincial chiefs, who defied their Emperor's orders for a share in the German's profits. The human stock was obtained by force; the German maintained a well-armed company of freebooters, and from time to time his men attacked villages, kidnapping all the children between the ages of three and eight. The human booty was taken to the island; they were kept there, the girls until they reached the age of from ten to twelve, the boys from twelve to sixteen. Herr G. was not ashamed of his trade. When I met him he boasted of his power, and with an air of importance showed me a photograph of himself in evening dress with a German Prince in the restaurant of the Berlin Adlon Hotel.

Haile Selassie was aware of the German, and when he had nothing more urgent to settle dispatched a detachment of regular soldiers against his island stronghold. But the clever slave-trader managed to escape the vigilance of the patrol ships and take his cargo across the sea to Arabia. He worked very cautiously, and his cruelty knew no bounds. As soon as a shipment was ready he would blindfold the slaves, load them on donkeys, and start the strange convoy over secret trails through the Abyssinian mountains and jungles to the sea. His select company of soldiers would choose the isolated ports on the French Somaliland coast to load the slaves into dhows; under a

moonless night they would cover them with sacks of coffee and so hide the true cargo from the inquisitive eyes of the patrol officers. As soon as the nachoda of the slave-dhow spied a patrol boat and suspected trouble he would order his crew to dump the human cargo into the sea. Such losses were always compensated by the profits made on those slaves who did reach the Arabian shores. During the boom years, between 1920 and 1925, as much as £180 was paid for a slave girl, as girls were always in demand for the harems of Arabia; boys were considerably cheaper, a healthy lad of twelve hardly ever fetching more than £50.

It is estimated that out of Arabia's population of 5,000,000, 700,000 live in slavery, but I believe there are at least one and a half million slaves, although the number is not increasing. The joint campaign of the European Powers and its mild yet increasingly active support by the native princes has resulted in an extended slump in the market, and it seems improbable that the business will ever recover its former volume. The liberation of slaves is going on at a steady pace, even though it is creating a sort of minor economic crisis, making history's most unusual and interesting unemployment situation—slave unemployment.

I discussed the matter with several Yemeni Arabs in Sheikh Said, who had liberated their slaves.

"To keep our former slaves," one of them said, "we must employ them as servants and pay them wages, but although we have foodstuffs enough to feed them, and houses to shelter them, we have no money to pay them. Durrah grows in the fields. But have you ever seen a field where the crops yield money?"

As a result most of these men had to discharge their former slaves, who, thrown upon their own

resources, cursed the British idea of civilization, as they preferred being slaves to going hungry. Today many nominally liberated slaves are back in the employment of their former owners in the status of slavery, enjoying what we would call their civil liberties.

While slaves were once considered precious possessions, today their owners put no great value upon them. I witnessed a striking demonstration of this metamorphosis during my short stay in Sheikh Said, the frontier town, and nearest Yemeni point to the Italians across the water.

I had gone ashore to meet Sheikh Achmed Nasir, the Imam's officer. Host-like, he lined up the thirty men of his frontier garrison in my honour, and then quickly offered his regrets, saying he was rather busy and had not much time to spend with me. It seems that the day before two slaves had come to the village in a canoe from Taif in Saudi Arabia. Running amuck with their new spirit of freedom, they had deserted their masters and in their inarticulate way of expressing it had come to Sheikh Said as a quiet haven of retreat. Now they were offering themselves to any work the community might wish them to do.

But the former owner of the two Achmeds had also arrived in Sheikh Said and, furious in the carefully concealed manner of the Arabs, was demanding an immediate interview with the Sheikh. His slaves had gone into a panicky hiding, and the Sheikh himself, fearing complications, was on the verge of a nervous collapse, for the Yemeni are definitely not anxious for trouble with Saudians. He made ready to receive the man from Taif, and was even willing to surrender the newcomers to him, when he learned that this was not why the Saudian had made that long trip down the Red Sea in pursuit of his escaped servants.

"They were strong men and lazy workers," he

said, "and if Allah helped them in their escape, bringing them down to your village, I am not here to correct His decision. But they have stolen my canoe, and I have come here to get it!"

The canoe was returned with general sighs of relief, and the Saudian left Sheikh Said completely satisfied and bearing no grudge. Since the abolition of slavery servants have become cheaper to hire than slaves once cost to maintain, but canoes continue to become more and more expensive.

Hardest hit by the slump was the tiny Red Sea island of Jebel Zuqur, famed throughout the past centuries as one of the busiest slave-trading centres in the Near East. In 1930 the island was still in its "old glory", frequented by traders as a market as well as a hiding-place whenever they were harassed by the patrol ships on the crossing. The rocky spot was almost invisible from the sea, and, being Yemeni territory, it was besides taboo to the sloops sailing under the Union Jack, French, or Italian flags. A German writer, in a book published in 1934, claimed that deep trenches hewn into the rocks made the island an impregnable stronghold, safe from unwanted intruders; and that the slaves were housed in huge cages awaiting transfer to their new masters across the sea. The author, a most reliable expert on the Near East, based his assertions on information received from the master of one of the English sloops, therefore I inclined towards accepting his story instead of listening to the denials of my Arab friends. So I gave instructions to the nachoda to include Zuqur in our itinerary.

But disappointment lay in wait. Zuqur presented itself as a dark, barren hill of obviously volcanic origin, bedecked with rocks of fanciful shape and covered with loose, granular, sandy-coloured earth and ashes. It was some ten miles long and seven miles wide; its highest peak somewhat over 2000 feet high.

In the south bay we found a perfect anchorage, and then the nachoda, Saif, and I went ashore in the canoe. Ghastly silence greeted us. As we penetrated farther, suddenly something whizzed past our small landing-party. It hopped from rock to rock, then high above our heads stopped to look down at us with frightened glances : it was a graceful antelope.

CHAPTER XIX

ITALY CROSSES THE RED SEA

THOUGH the German's romantic story turned out to be naught but a nightmare of Teutonic imagination, I enjoyed my visit to Jebel Zuqur. Here I found the tranquillity of the sea delightful; there was an almost heavenly calm in the air; a silent peace enveloped the rocks, while the light breeze brought a lilting undertone up from the shore as the waters lapped at the edges of the island. I shared the desolate rocks with scores of gracious gazelles and a multitude of exotic birds, the island's only permanent inhabitants. Nobody challenged my playful claim to the possession of this secluded spot. But then, of a sudden, the nachoda came running up to me, grabbed my arm excitedly, and pointed down to the bay:

"Look," he yelled, "there is a strange ship!"

Slowly from a westerly direction came a small submarine, flying, somewhat too conspicuously, a huge Italian ensign. She was sailing directly towards us, and when she was about half a mile from the spot where we were standing, sailors climbed out on its small deck and began lowering the flag as if to hide their identity. I suspected nothing unusual. I knew that officers of the patrol ships frequently came to this rocky island for a day of good antelope-shooting.

Now a motor-boat was put off and headed fast

towards the shore. There were some five officers in the boat, but none of them carried guns, and I realized that they had something other than big-game hunting on their minds. I quickly pulled the nachoda behind a rock, where they could not see us but we could watch their doings. Soon the little party of officers landed, trigonometrical instruments were set up, and they started to survey the small plateau at the south bay. Another officer went out on the bay in the launch to take depth soundings. They worked for hours, or at least so it seemed to me in my uncomfortable hiding-place. Yet I was determined to stay there, for I knew that I was an unwanted witness at a very important event: Italy's survey of Jebel Zuqur, to be used when Signor Mussolini decides to cross the Red Sea. Then this little island will play an important role in the strategy of Italian invaders, the stepping-stone for their expedition to the Yemen.

Now the boat returned and collected the landing-party. Only when she dashed back to the submarine did I leave my hiding, and went down to the bay to wave good-bye to the departing Italians. My appearance caused no little surprise aboard the craft. The capitano came up from below and through gigantic binoculars surveyed me. He shouted commands; soon the deck was cleared and, after running out to sea, the craft submerged.

The Italians were conducting a thorough survey of the entire Red Sea area, without informing the other interested Powers. They insisted that they were within their rights, as the British Admiralty had done the same some years before. There was, however, a slight difference between these two surveys. The British were collecting data for the benefit of international shipping. The result of their survey was published in the *Red Sea Pilot* and made available for all nations willing to pay the nominal fee. The Italians, on the

contrary, kept their discoveries to themselves and filed them in their secret naval archives.*

Was my strange encounter further proof of Il Duce's imminent invasion of the Yemen? Only the day before, when I had visited the Imam's representative at Sheikh Said, he had told me of a significant occurrence. In the winter of 1936, during the Ethiopian campaign, an Italian troopship anchored off Sheikh Said and, to the amazement of the natives, landed several hundred Italian Blackshirts. Tents were set up to house the troops, a field kitchen to feed them; their whole attitude indicated that the Italians had come to stay.

The chief sent a swift runner to Taiz to inform the Vizier, who in turn communicated with the Imam in Sana. His Majesty was furious. A strongly worded protest was wired to Marshal Badoglio in Asmara, and then—to underline his meaning—the Imam dispatched a company of soldiers to Sheikh Said to man the old Turkish forts high up in the rocky hills overlooking the bay of Sheikh Said. The decrepit guns were cleaned, posts set up, ammunition distributed, and everything made ready to show that the

* In the Anglo-Italian Agreement, signed in Rome on April 16th, 1938, several articles are devoted to the problem of the islands. To the average reader who glances at these passages their strange names may mean little. Yet they have a tremendous strategical importance to those who control the Red Sea and Southern Arabia, or attempt to get control over these parts of the world.

In the agreement Britain gives her consent to the establishment of Italian posts on several islands, thus virtually surrendering them and aiding Italy to prepare for a campaign against the Yemen. Apart from the fact that Britain had no right to dispose of territory which is—according to international law—property of the Yemeni Imam, this was an ill-advised and fatal move. The islands are ideally situated to enable Italy to interfere with shipping in the Red Sea, even without establishing a definite foothold in the Yemen.

Thus Italy succeeded in creating a status in the Red Sea which already exists in the Mediterranean. There she has possessions in the north and in the south, while here she is represented on the west as well as on the east coast. In the event of war in which Britain might be involved Italy could make British shipping—to put it mildly—extremely difficult both in the Mediterranean and in the Red Sea.

Yemenis were determined to put up a stiff fight should the Italians try to invade the Yemen too in the heat of the Ethiopian adventure. As a result of the Imam's lightning move Marshal Badoglio sent another troopship to Sheikh Said, and within forty-eight hours after their arrival the Blackshirts were on their way back to Eritrea. Moreover, the Marshal wired his apologies and his assurance that it would never happen again.

So serious was the situation that Badoglio sent a personal envoy to Sana to restore the shaken friendship. This envoy explained that the Blackshirts were convalescents of the Ethiopian campaign and needed a change from the hellish climate of Eritrea to help their recovery. The wise Imam knew that the whole manœuvre was but a kite to test his reaction—it was, in fact, the first and so far only attempt to land troops on the eastern shore of the Red Sea. And even though it failed there will undoubtedly be a repetition.

Shortly afterwards the Italians began buying up large tracts of desolate land on the Yemen coast through petty native chiefs. According to Yemeni law no land can be purchased by foreigners. Neutral observers believe that when Mussolini finds the time ripe for the armed invasion of the Yemen his men will stage an incident similar to the Wal Wal incident which started the Ethiopian War, when an Italian outpost clashed with Ethiopian frontier guards on territory claimed by both countries. In an attempt to forestall this the Imam recently prohibited the sale of land entirely, in order to keep within the treaty signed in September 1937, which gave Italy preferential privileges.

Wherever I turned in the Red Sea I found unconcealed evidence of Italian activity. In the vicinity of Jebel Zuqur, about 500 feet above sea level, on a rocky plateau one mile in diameter, I saw a neatly

whitewashed lighthouse—another object of Italy's recent attention. This lighthouse had been erected by the Turks at the end of the last century, but for the past two decades, since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Britain had operated it, paying all expenses, although it served international shipping in the Red Sea. In October 1935 a terrific gale destroyed the building, much to the relief of Britain, since the upkeep was a heavy burden on the limited revenue of the Aden Superintendent of Ports. It was decided not to rebuild the house; the two Maltese keepers were withdrawn, the structure abandoned and left to decay.

Almost immediately an Italian destroyer landed engineers and labourers on Centre Peak to repair the destroyed buildings and equipment. Soon the light was flashing its familiar warning once more. The Italian move was undertaken without informing the British, and the Aden authorities learned of it only when ships reported the light was working again. Today there is always a small detachment of Italian askaris on Centre Peak, to "protect the light against Arab banditry"—a hardly substantial excuse.

Yet all these islands play only a secondary role in the perfectly planned Italian strategy on the Red Sea; they are after the Yemen's 400 miles of Eastern Red Sea coast, which Italy needs to supplement her western line of fortifications running from the Brothers in the south, along the west coast through Assab and ending in impregnable strongholds around Massawa. Signor Mussolini is well aware of the fact that with his forces established on both shores and on the sea the importance of the Suez Canal would rapidly diminish, and Britain would be compelled either to come to terms with Italy or to switch back to the old and long route round the west coast of Africa.

It seems to me that while the men in Aden are fully

aware of the danger, London refuses to listen to their warnings. From an Italian source I learned that in 1937 the Aden Government dispatched one of its best political officers, Captain Seager, to the Yemen, with orders to obtain permission for the erection of emergency landing-places on Yemeni territory. The mission of Seager was kept a carefully guarded secret, chiefly because the Aden authorities expected an Italian countermove should the Eritrean administration learn of his intention. But the Italians have their eyes everywhere, and they were informed of Seager's arrival as soon as he had set foot on Yemeni soil. I am pretty sure that their information came from native sources, since my informant spoke of Captain Seager as Colonel Cigar—the Arab's variant of his name. The Italian machinery was promptly set in motion, and Seager's mission was paralysed. Again a special Italian envoy was sent to the Imam, who urged His Majesty to reject Seager's offer, and even persuaded him to protest in London against the very idea of having British airfields in the Yemen. The London Government, in its effort not to embarrass the Italians, was only too quick to order Seager to leave the Yemen. There was nothing the Residency could do but to invite the Imam's representative to Aden and to repeat the proposal through this intermediary, but, in spite of the continued efforts, unsuccessfully.

Italy's Yemen policy is directed by a genial and very enterprising gentleman, Signor Jacopo Gasparoni, member of the Senate, who in 1926 was Governor of Eritrea, and today is Mussolini's ambassador-at-large as far as the Red Sea and the Yemen is concerned. He is frequently in Sana. Sometimes he sails across from Massawa to Hodeida, but sometimes he goes via Aden, carrying on his activities openly in the presence of the British authorities. At home in Italy, another Senator, Amadeo Giannini, is in charge

of plans. To camouflage the political aspects the Istituto per l'Oriente, an allegedly scientific institute, was created. Its headquarters at 67 Via Lucrezio Caro, in Rome, is the source of Italy's Arab propaganda. This, also, is where Italy keeps her gigantic archives of first-hand information concerning the Near East. It is also the publication office of *Oriente Moderno*, a periodical conveying reliable information about Arabian affairs to European readers. Its range of information is amazing. This highly important periodical shows how seriously Italy takes the Red Sea problem.

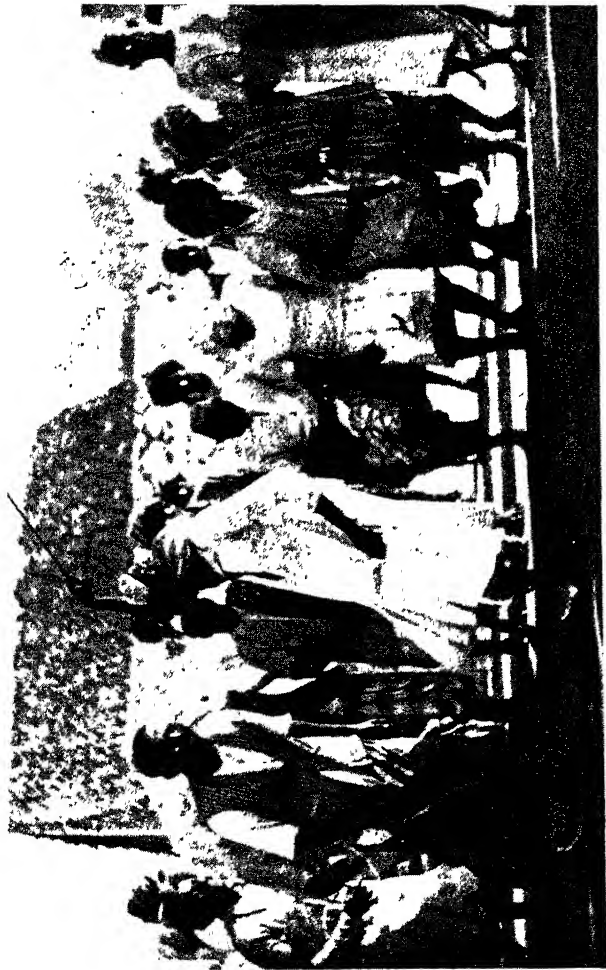
There are other indications of Britain's careless handling of her vital Near Eastern and Red Sea problem. The head of the Foreign Office's Egyptian department, under whose care came Eritrea, Ethiopia and the Red Sea as well, was Maurice Peterson, an extremely able Civil Servant, who did a perfect job during the Ethiopian campaign. In 1936 this man, who had a fine and thoroughgoing knowledge of the problems facing England in this part of the world, was lifted from his desk in the Foreign Office and made Minister in—Sofia. Under such circumstances the Arabs are inclined to believe the Italian agitators when they say: "Up to 1935, the Mediterranean was regarded a sphere of British interest; but then our Duce ordered a demonstration of the Italian fleet. And what happened? The English left the sea in panic, and today it belongs to us, to us alone!" And again: "You respect the force of the British! Well, but where is this force? Have you seen it during the past fifteen years? It is dead, and it died of old age!"

In Arabia Bacon's word is especially true: "Nothing destroys authority more than stressing it too far or relaxing it too much." The Arabs wonder and say: "The saint's miraculous power ceases at his burial"—and begin replacing England.

An excellent Englishman, Colonel Harold F. Jacob, then Political Secretary of the Aden administration, foresaw this turn of events already in 1923. He predicted: "In the Red Sea the Italians might exert a civilizing interest. Here our own interests, perhaps, do predominate, and some folk, jealous of our stance, have styled this sea a British lake. The Persian Gulf is another. The Italians and ourselves might work in partnership in the Red Sea." He comes to the final conclusion, which is particularly applicable today: "Let us who are the next-door neighbours of the Arabs in the Yemen either push British influence there, or make way for others so minded." It might prove fatal if, while Aden officials take the first part of this sentence to heart, London accepts the second!

When in 1922 Colonel Jacob generously quoted *Cymbeline*, King of Britain, saying, "Let a Roman and a British ensign wave friendly together," Italy was a betrayed and terror-stricken power, too impotent to endanger British interests. Today Italy is an expanding power with far-sighted and clever political methods. The policy which Signor Mussolini is pursuing in the Near East is an exact replica of Britain's policy which eventually undermined the Ottoman Empire. She has learned from England the valuable lesson that ten secret agents are often more successful and always cheaper than ten battalions. It appears that the Yemen will provide an early test of this theory.

In her long-range enterprise Italy recently was joined by a willing sleeping-partner—Japan. Nippon is mainly interested in keeping the British fleet busy in the Mediterranean and in the Red Sea and away from Hongkong, Singapore and Chinese and Dutch East Indian waters. In this connection it is not altogether without interest to note that the self-same Imam Yahya who in the past objected to his subjects



RITUAL DANCES AT KAMARAN

The traditional swords have been replaced by sticks



KAMARAN DANCES

Each dance lasts until the drums, which have been previously heated before a fire, cool off and lose their tension

travelling abroad now consented to one of his sons going as far as Japan. Officially the trip was termed a goodwill mission. Diplomatic Saiful-Islam Hussein was sent to represent his father at the inauguration of Japan's first mosque. Both the Italians and the Yemenis insist that there is no political significance to this trip ; but even so the prince sailed from Brindisi on the Italian boat *Conte Verde*, and, no doubt, under the constant influence of Italian advisers. It would surprise no one if soon the Japanese appear in the Red Sea as a result of Hussein's journey. The Rome-Berlin axis would then be extended in a straight geographical line through the Red Sea, in the dogged effort to oust Britain from the Orient altogether.

It is not too late for Britain to regain her lost ground. Wherever I went I found Italy only feared but never respected. On the *Lucky* my men liked a song which originated in Syria and was sung all over Arabia :

Mussolini said he brings
Civilization to Abyssinia ;
But he only brought
Bombs and poison gas !

So the seemingly calm waters of the sea are full of suspense and tension—waiting for the great showdown, when—many thousands of years after Pharaoh's vain attempt—another mighty power will try to cross them. Will it be successful in establishing in Arabia a remote outpost of the new Roman Empire ? Or will the Sea again resist the intrusion of the chariots, the horsemen, and all the host of Mussolini ? Allah alone knows, and time is the revealer.

CHAPTER XX

GHETTOS OF ARABIA

I HOPED that in this community of living corpses I would find equality among men ; but no—even these ghosts have set up castes ! There were higher and lower ranks in Mocha, the higher ones looking down upon the lower ones. There was an impoverished sayed who disdained the idle merchant ; the merchant scorned the drowsy peasant ; the peasant trampled upon the starving slave, and all Moslems despised the town's few Jews.

I asked a wretched slave to show me the way to the Jewish Quarter. He jumped to his feet and cried, "I'll tell you the way, but you'll have to go alone. I would not soil my feet in Qa'ul-Yahud !" As he uttered the word "Yahud", which is the Arabic for Jew, he spat out in disgust. But my bewildered face brought an apology. "I beg you not to feel offended, O sahib ! Whenever the name of Yahuda is mentioned—Allah curse him—I have to spit !" A few coins seemed to overcome his aversion and he accompanied me to the north end of the town. Pointing to a row of low buildings, he said, "Here is where the Yahuda live !"—and took to his heels as if the devil were chasing him.

Qu'al-Yahud was also in a state of decay, but its spotlessness was a contrast to the smelling dirt of the Arabs' quarters. Bearded old men squatted in the dust in front of their houses and with them sat their women-folk—since Jewish women are not confined to the

harem. The men were a strange picture, with their small black skull-caps covering their clean-shaven heads and their ritual curls bunched at the temples. They wore long white shirts yellowed with age, while the women were gaily dressed in multi-coloured striped silk blouses and tight pants.

There was one two-storeyed house in the Quarter. It was a near-ruin with its large hollow gaps in the walls of the ground floor, and only an intimation that there had once been a floor above. I asked a man : "Does anyone live in this ruin?" He answered, "Yes, the Rabbi."

It was not easy to get an audience with Mocha's venerable Hebrew priest ; he was a harassed man and foreigners frightened him. But when his disciples assured him that I had only profound sympathy, he consented to receive me. I found him sitting in a gigantic arm-chair—a fragile little man with a wavy, long white beard. His skin, pallid as death, bore witness to the story that the Rabbi had not left the confinement of his room for more than forty years. It was an ascetic vow he had imposed upon himself, a silent protest against the Jew-baiting Arab environment. His was the heroic self-restraint of the Pope who refused to leave the Vatican when in 1870 he was deposed from temporal power by the King of Italy. He was a mixture of sadness and gaiety as though crying through philosophic smiles. He was dressed in the customary long white shirt ; his skinny fingers clutched the pearls of a rosary and his withered lips sucked the tube of a gigantic mada'ah, as the *nargileh* is called in the Yemen.

His name was Rabbi Soleiman ibn Musa, Arabic for "Solomon, the son of Moses". He greeted me in Arabic with a murmured, "Ya'asalaam!"—since Arabic was his colloquial language, and he spoke Hebrew only with his books.

This famished patriarch did not blame the Arabs for the Jews' tragic lot. "We asked for it," he said stoically, "and now we have to bear the anguish." From a shelf where his books were arranged in painstaking order he lifted an ancient Bible, put it on his lap, and with his thin fingers moistened began to turn its pages. It did not take him long, for he had read this page so often. It was the Book of Ezra the Prophet, and Rabbi Soleiman ibn Musa now began to read it to me :

"Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,

"Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

"Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (he is the God); which is in Jerusalem. . . .

"Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem."

The old Rabbi looked up from the Book, laid it aside, and continued in the same trembling, chanting voice. "These men were the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had carried away unto Babylon. Now they came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city. There came the children of Parosh, of Arat, of Elam, of Zattu, of Zaccai, of Adonikam; the men of Netophah, and of Anathoth; the priests; the singers; the children of Solomon's servants; and all the others.

The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and three score. Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven—and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women. Their horses were seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five; their camels, four hundred thirty and five; their asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty . . .”

He looked down to the wooden floor, closed his eyes and, now wailing, went on: “Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah—this Ezra went up from Babylon and received a letter from Artaxerxes king of Persia. Now this is what was in the letter that king gave unto Ezra: ‘I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm which are minded of their own free-will to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee.’ Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, which has put such a thing as this in the king’s heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.”

I listened in silent reverence as Rabbi Soleiman continued his tale. “At that time the Yemen was in the hands of prosperous kings and prosperity prevailed in her hills. The Jews, men of considerable wealth and esteem, lived in amity and comfort, and when Ezra came unto them saying ‘I came to gather together out of Israel chief men to go up with me’ they scorned him and threw stones at him, and hired assassins to kill him. So Ezra had to flee from the anger of the Israelites, alone, but he turned back from the border of this land and cursed the Jews of the Yemen. He cursed them to perish in poverty, to go barefooted, to be oppressed and disdained, until the end of their days shall come.”

Silence fell over the room—Rabbi Soleiman ibn Musa was absorbed in his thoughts. Then he looked at me and said sadly, "We trifled away the opportunity, and thus we are poor, barefooted, disdained, and oppressed."

The Rabbi was probably the only Jew in the Yemen who dared let the name Ezra ever pass his lips. These men whose forefathers had been cursed by the Prophet were in such superstitious awe of his memory that the name Ezra had never been given to a single Jewish boy in all the Yemen.

The Arabs also know of Ezra's visit to the Yemen. A passage in the Koran reads: "Do not fly; but return to that wherein ye delighted, and to your habitations—peradventure ye will be asked. They answered, 'Alas for us!—verily we have been unjust.'"

The commentators interpret this passage as Ezra's ill-fated mission. Yet a different legend in the Yemen explains the Arabs' traditional Jew-baiting. It is told that once in its history there was a Jewish king who favoured members of his own race and persecuted the others. The memory of this cruel dynasty engendered hatred in the hearts of the Arabs, which was intensified when Mohammed, too, scorned the Jews because they rejected him.

In the early years of his mission the Prophet approached the Jews around Mecca and offered himself to them as their new Messiah. But the Jews refused to accept his teachings, whereupon Mohammed revealed the seventeenth chapter of the Koran, in which he said, "And we expressly declared unto the children of Israel in the book of the law, saying, 'Ye will surely commit evil in the earth twice.'" When the first transgression was committed the forces of Goliath descended upon Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple; at the time of the second transgression the Persian army of Gudarz conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple once more. In the refusal of his offer

Mohammed perceived a third transgression, and threatened, "If ye return to transgress a third time we also will return to chastise you."

"And this came accordingly to pass," says the commentator Al Beidawi. "For the Jews being again so wicked as to reject Mohammed, and conspire against his life, God delivered them into his hands; and he exterminated the tribe of Koreidha, and slew the chiefs of Al Nadir, and obliged the rest of the Jewish tribes to pay tribute."

The old Rabbi borrowed his tale from the Bible, and the larger part of his story was a direct quotation. The Bible was the only source of his knowledge, and he knew nothing about the Jews of the Yemen before or after Ezra; how they had come down to Southern Arabia and what had made them come. Away from his Bible, this unpretentious little priest was ignorance personified, and when I now asked him, "Tell me about the origin of the Jews in the Yemen," he looked at me in bewilderment and said:

"How should I know about the origin? We have five thousand years of history, and no man can know so long a story."

As far as I could learn, the Yemen's Jews came down to the south after the second destruction of the Temple, when many of their fellow-countrymen had been carried away into captivity by the Babylonians. As a matter of fact, these men have few of what we call typical Jewish characteristics—they have delicate, clean-cut features and the yellow-greenish complexion of the Mongolian; and an authority on the Yemen Jews told me that they are Jews only by religion and not by race. They are a mixture of Malaysians and Ethiopians, and are descendants of the Himyar kings, one of whom embraced Judaism some fifteen hundred years ago. When I told this version to Rabbi Soleiman he protested:

"No, no, effendi; we are Jews whose forefathers worshipped in the Temple of Jerusalem. We are the descendants of Abraham and Esau, and there is no other but Jewish blood in our veins."

"But what of those Jews who are born of Arab women?" I asked Rabbi Soleiman ibn Musa.

The Rabbi's eyes blazed. "Never do Jewish men take Arab women unto themselves! Mixed marriages do not exist among our people."

I learned that only half of this was true, for Arabs often take their wives from the ghetto. Ameen Rihani says that no hatred is so strong as to keep an Arab from going into the ghetto in search of the three joys of which the poet sings—wine, a fair face, and flowers. Thus it happens frequently enough that an Arab gentleman proposes to a Jewish lady. To refuse the honourable offer would be a serious offence—so the girl leaves the ghetto and also her faith. She must embrace Islam, and her children are reared in her new faith.

The Arabs care nothing for Hitler's new racial theories, and as soon as a Jewish girl becomes the Moslem wife of an Arab her past is forgiven and forgotten.

According to law, Jewish orphans under the age of six are taken from the ghetto, converted into Moslems, and reared in Arab environment to become members of the Moslem community. These waifs are "Children of the Imam", since he must provide for them until they are able to earn their own livelihoods. This has created a secret community in the Yemen, the maranos of Arabia. Here Moslem proselytizing has recreated a condition similar to that caused by the cruel force of the Spanish Inquisition. To escape the tormenting persecution of Torquemada, many mediæval Spanish Jews were baptized. Although they went to church on Sundays they remained Jews at heart,

and on their Sabbath they gathered in underground synagogues to worship Jehovah.

Some of the Jewish orphans become good Moslems, but most of them are unable to escape the memory of their Jewish tradition, and practise both religions. They are afraid to visit the rabbis or go to the synagogues, but they cherish the Old Testament, and keep the prayer-cloth and the phylacteries hidden in unobtrusive places in their houses. When night falls over Arabia they light a candle in an umbrageous corner, read the passage of the day, and protest, "*Sh'ma Yisroel, Adonai Elohenu Adonai Echod!*" ("Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God the Lord is one!")

Rabbi Soleiman knew of the existence of these Yemeni maranos, but he refused to speak about them. When he meets them on the street his eyes radiate silent greetings, and they embrace each other in thought; but they do not stop to talk, for it would be fatal, not only to them, but to the several thousands compelled to worship their God secretly in the still of the Arabian night.

The Jews of the Yemen survived the persecution, and although their number decreased there are still about 50,000 living in her cities and villages. Unwritten laws regulate their mode of living; a Jew is not permitted to live among Moslems, nor may he build his house higher than those of the Arabs. He is not allowed to ride a horse, and should he meet a Moslem while on his donkey he must dismount until the Moslem has passed. Jews were forced to live in ghettos, could come to town only on urgent business, and had to return to their quarters before sunset.

Yet no oppression could exclude them from the Arabs' life. The Jews became the artisans of the Yemen, manufacturing enchanting jewellery for the ladies of the harem; they built distilleries whither the Arabs flocked for strong, forbidden spirits, and they

became indispensable as rent-collectors for Arab landlords whose religion forbade severity with tardy tenants. As time went on they were content with their lot; and because they paid tribute to the kings in exchange for protection they lived unmolested in their Jewish quarters. The tribute is still collected by Imam Yahya. For the annual three riyals minimum for each person they are relieved of the duties of citizenship.

But since wise Imam Yahya has been on the throne the century-old barriers are slowly melting away. The Jews are now permitted to set up their stalls in the Arab markets, and even to live in houses outside the ghetto. When they are cheated by a Moslem they may ask reparation under the Tree of Justice. And when a Jew is murdered by an Arab his family must be compensated with the usual blood-money, or else the murderer is executed. No wonder they say "We live in security" when asked "Are you content here?"

Even though the Arabs curse the Jew, swear at him, now and then beat him up for want of anything else to do, deep down inside themselves they regard the Jew with a certain respect. It is the glowing religious fervour of the Yemeni Jew—his personal sacrifices to the complicated ritual of his faith, his frequent holidays with their varying significance—which makes the Arab look upon the Jew as a sort of superman. I have never and nowhere, neither at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem nor in the crammed ghetto streets of Warsaw, seen men practise their religion with more sincere devotion and ascetic self-denial than do the Jews in the Yemen. They call themselves Timonim, which is one of the Sephardic sects. They maintain sixteen synagogues in Sana alone, and every village ghetto has at least one, always kept scrupulously clean. Each synagogue has several Thoras,

and in one of their synagogues I counted 134 of these Bible scrolls lavishly decorated with pure silver, although the community had hardly enough to eat.

A rabbi said to me, "If we want to keep our souls clean, we have to keep our houses clean."

In observance, they live a wholesome life, go to no strange women; consequently, there is no disease among the Jews. Perseverance in religious matters and the purity in their daily lives help them survive the curses of Ezra.

These days new Ezras come down to the Yemen to lure the Jews back to the Holy Land—they are representatives of the Zionist movement. When the first Zionist agent, Eliezer ben Yavnieli, succeeded in getting in touch with the Yemen's Jews they were hopeful and made preparations for migration. But the Imam stepped in. He needed his Jews, who are the country's only artisans and most excellent rent-collectors; he needed them as an example of clean life and sober ideals. His refusal to let them go was misunderstood by the Zionists. They believed the Imam wanted to keep them in tyranny, and so illegal means were sought to help them slip out of the country to Aden, where the Jewish Agency had established a branch office to help these refugees reach Palestine.

But they were strangers in the Holy Land, for they have a greater kinship with the Moslem Arabs than with their own Russian and Polish co-religionists. They speak Arabic better than Hebrew, and their customs are those of Arabia. They found their Holy Land unholy!

In another part of the Yemen I met a wealthy Jewish merchant who had made a pilgrimage to Palestine. Before he left he had to deposit bail of £1000 with the Imam's treasury as security that he would return. When, upon his homecoming, this

prodigal son of Israel was received by the Imam, he exclaimed :

“O, Mowlay, the Lord greet you with bounty and peace ; I have come only to thank you for permitting me to stay in your land. I have travelled far to visit the land of my ancestors ; but, alas, I found a different Jerusalem. There the Moslems are not Moslems, the Christians not Christians, and the Jews are far from being Jews. They all live in heathen haste, in a pagan flurry ; and in their greedy impetuosity they completely forget our Lord God. After having been there I am more happy than ever to be allowed to live in al Yaman, in the shade of your justice and wisdom !”

And he kissed the hand of the Imam, which no Jew had ever done before.

CHAPTER XXI

WIND—AND NO WIND

BACK on the *Lucky*, we sailed in a straight northern course. The nachoda tried to dissuade me from further escapades. "We have to hurry, sahib, if you want me to take you to the top of the Sea. We are still at its bottom, and there is still a long, long way to go!"

Glorious spring had come to its end, and the winds were about to change. To the Arabs the winds are the two seasons of the year; they know neither summer nor winter, spring nor autumn. They speak of the season of the north-west monsoon, from October until early May; and of the south-west monsoon, which blows the rest of the year. The same winds have driven the same dhows since time immemorial—and the same types have manned them.

By now I was their friend, and extremely proud of their friendship. On this trip I learned that you cannot hate a man if you know him; and although I had regarded them with mistrust at first I now loved them with sincere affection. I would just sit and look at them—their marked faces bitten by the salt of the sea; their muscles steeled by the ropes and their hearts mellowed by the Arab tradition of chivalry. They all came of families born to the sea. They in turn became her faithful lovers. When they were not sailing they were busy building new dhows, repairing the sails, braiding fresh ropes—and yearning to go back to the sea. When they are ready to die, when the ropes fall

from the trembling hands of the old salt, his son and grandson stand by to catch the dropped rope and carry on. Thus they go on from century to century, an endless chain of seafaring Bedouins. Theirs is an adventurous destiny ; and now, as I muse over fading reminiscences, I find myself longing for the old dhow, the old sea, the old winds.

They haunt me—her lutes and forests ;
No beauty on earth I see,
But shadowed with that dream recalls
Her loveliness to me :
Still eyes look coldly upon me—
Cold voices whisper and say :
“He is crazed with the spell of far Arabia ;
They have stolen his wits away.”

By the erratic moodiness of the winds I knew we had arrived at the junction of the two monsoons ; now there was a fresh breeze, now absolute calm, and now again a mounting gust. At such times the sea is particularly dangerous, because the contrary winds bound against each other in violent gales. It was late, and darkness shrouded the sea, only a faint beam showing the way—the light of Abu Ail. It went circling the quoin island visible only for the fragment of a second, to be lost again until the light returned. Soon the late moon illuminated the waters, mixing its own cold yellow with the dark blue of the sea. Now we could see the island ahead of us with its lighthouse and whitewashed building for the two keepers.

In the captivity of this lonely rock live the two Maltese keepers with their two Arab servants. A steamer from Aden calls to relieve them from duty every 372 days. Abu Ail is the most gruesome of all the Red Sea islands, for it is a mass of irregular rock so small that when the keepers want to stretch their legs they must climb up and down a gruelling stairway carved into the grey mass.

It was a humid night, and no sleep would come to my eyes. So I went up to Saif, the sailor who had the watch at the steering-wheel.

"Peculiar night," I said, and he nodded.

"Yes," he said, "at night the Genii haunt the sea!" To drive them away he murmured a prayer. "I fly for refuge unto the Lord of this sea, that he may defend me from the foolish among his people."

Then he pointed to Abu Ail, and said in a whisper, "These islands are haunted by the ghosts of two men and a woman."

I became interested, and asked him to tell me the story of the ghosts; but he was afraid they might be about and hear him, so he put it off "until the light will be eaten up by the darkness".

Waiting for his tale, I shared the narrow bridge with Saif, until Abu Ail vanished beyond the horizon, and the helmsman began: "Women are not permitted to share the solitude of the men on the lights, but many years ago a young man persuaded the government to permit his wife to stay with him on Abu Ail. She was a beautiful Italian woman, and her husband rejoiced in having her with him. There was another keeper on the light, in whose heart a tender passion was born for the woman. When he discovered this foolish affection he struggled against the demands of his blood; and nightly, when his friend relieved him from the watch, instead of returning to his room next to the one where the woman was asleep he would take a boat and row around in the sea until dawn. But one night he went to the house, entered the woman's room, and before she could open her eyes seized her and carried her down to the jetty. After he left her in a faint on the jetty he again rowed out to sea to put an end to his own life; but oh, sahib, he was a coward, and when morning came he returned to the lighthouse as though nothing had happened.

Hoping that the man would perish in the waves, the woman had not told her husband, and now it was too late; so night after night she had to go down to the jetty with the man when he came off his watch. On the seventh night of their forbidden joys the suspicious husband followed them. And when the man laid hands on the woman he stepped forward, a rifle in his hand and revenge in his eyes. The silence of the night was shattered by a scream, and then the rocks returned the hollow echo of two thundering shots."

The wind grew stronger, as if in gruesome accompaniment to this Red Sea melodrama. Saif continued :

"Peace returned to the island—the peace of the graveyard. We who sailed past the rock noticed something wrong with the light. For nights at a stretch there would be no light, and sometimes it would circle in a crazy rush or flicker like a torch in the hands of a madman. We reported it to the government, and a boat was sent out to investigate. When the captain went ashore he was met by the keeper; his clothes were torn to rags, his eyes madly flaming, and there was a rifle in his hands. To save his own life the captain shot the keeper, who collapsed on the jetty, blood streaming from his heart. The captain cautiously made his way up to the house. Deathly silence greeted him. In the bedroom, on the bloodstained bed, he found the two rotting bodies—the rival and the woman, with whom the maddened keeper had shared the house for weeks."

The wind, which had been blowing a steady *crescendo* to the tale, now broke loose in furious *fortissimo*. It whipped the smooth water into high waves, and gripped the sail so hard that the mast swayed and the boat tipped, a helpless victim of the wild elements. All the men leapt to loosen the ropes,

and at the very moment the sail was about to be lowered the wind seized it with a raging blast and tore it to pieces.

For hours we were tossed and thrown as the dashing waves hurled the tiny craft up to their towering peaks and then dropped it again down into the depths of their dark valleys. The nachoda and his two helmsmen had their hands full steadying the wheel, while the two other sailors and Sayed Omar and I tried to hold the mast against the wind. Despite the raging storm, there was not the slightest excitement on board. Outroaring the wind, I shouted to the nachoda, "Do you think, nachoda, that we will escape from this mess?" He roared back :

"Yes—if Allah wills !"

Dawn drove the gale away, and by the time the sun had risen from behind the sand-dunes of the Yemen its rays broke on a sea which was once more smooth and motionless. Had it not been for the torn canvas the night's storm might have been but a gruesome dream. But the sail had been destroyed and we were prisoners of the sea. Without a word of complaint the whole crew sat down to sew the pieces together, and after twelve hours of work they laid it aside unfinished. Only towards the end of the following day was the sail put together and the canvas hoisted. The danger over, the sailors faced towards Mecca.

I stand in great admiration of these seafaring Bedouins, who uttered not a word of complaint when we were helpless toys in the invisible hands of the gale, but now that two days of hard labour had restored our sail they thanked Allah for His gracious care and benevolent protection.

Now there was no wind at all, but with last night's gale still in our bones we did not care much for wind. Saif smiled. "No wind is better than too much

wind." And as we drifted along he sat down to sing a song.

"Thy hand, from want, O Master, frees;
Thy wont to give and mine to please—
The singer gets, at least, the lees.

"What is my capital and wealth,
But thine own liberal ways?
And of what use my wit and health
If I sing not thy praise?"

And then another romantic chant, in which a fair creature took the place of the Master.

"If thou canst not come thyself, Beloved,
Send thy shadow with thy magic art;
Clothe desertion with the silk of promise—
Even thy promise heals my broken heart."

Sayed Omar, the pious Wahabi, did not like this frivolous chant, so to counteract the singing of the broken-hearted troubadour he pulled his business books from his bundle and buried himself in them. The others idled in the bow, and I tried to make up the sleep lost the previous night.

But there was still no wind.

We had been drifting for forty-eight hours, but had made no headway. The canvas hung from the mast like the broken wing of a bird. There was nothing but water as far as our eyes could see.

The perpetual calm was more nerve-racking than the short fury of the gale. Again I stormed the nachoda with an impatient question.

"Where are we, Nachoda?"

He did not know. As soon as we had lost sight of land he lost his knowledge of navigation. "Wait until the stars come up," he said, "then I shall know where we are. I read it from the stars."

The stars came up—the nachoda stayed lost. “We cannot be far from Kamaran,” he said. Then, looking up to the sky, “Yes, yes—Kamaran must be here in the vicinity.”

“All right, but where?” I urged. He shrugged his shoulders. “Somewhere, not very far. We’ll get to Kamaran, if Allah wills, or if not to Kamaran so to Jaizan or to Midi. We’ll get somewhere, with the help of Allah.”

I thought I saw a faint sparkle of uneasiness in his eyes ; his “inshallah” was not as confident as it used to be, and he did not seem so sure of the “somewhere”. On the fifth day of our voyage a huge luxury liner steamed past in the distance, which gave us the idea of signalling the next boat. We made a bonfire of the cook-fire in the bow of the dhow and waited. Two days passed—but no steamers. We had consumed the last drop of fresh water, and were now drinking tea made with boiled sea water—a disgusting liquid which made us even thirstier. I had opened my last tin of baked beans and was now sharing the crew’s durrâh and rice.

Every now and then Saif would catch a fish, and if we liked its looks, it would be fried for dinner. It was only the lack of fresh water which made our aimless drifting so hard to bear. The salty tea set my throat afire, and nothing would quench this painful thirst. Soon I was so weak that I could not even get up. I was no longer excited about the absent wind, too dead to rage or even to hope. During these hours of agony I watched the nachoda. He spent the day in the seclusion of the bridge, unemployed, since there was no work to be done, no steering, no changing of the sails. He sat up there, an aged and broken man, silent and motionless—only his lips moved. He was murmuring a prayer, over and over again. He had lost confidence in his own abilities, in the stars and in the

winds—but not his faith in Allah, the Merciful and Compassionate.

Watching the prayer-mumbling nachoda, my tired eyes closed in sleep, in a sleep from which—I feared—there would be no awakening. When I regained consciousness, eighteen hours later, I was surrounded by strange men, kneeling at my side ; one was pouring tea into me, another listening to my heartbeat, and the third was holding my pulse.

The tea was good. It was made with fresh water with brandy in it. Soon I was able to sit up ; and then, as if all the days of drifting had been only a bad dream, I was my old self again, and honestly happy at that.

I asked the usual question : “Where are we, nachoda ?”

“At Kamaran, sahib,” the old man said, and added, “I told you, sahib, we’d get to Kamaran if Allah willed !” He was grateful to his God—not because He had helped him back to life—but because He had not let him down in the eyes of an infidel.

In the bow the crew were assembling to turn to Allah in prayer to thank Him for our miraculous escape. It was a long bill they had to settle with their Creator, and the sing-song of their prayer was full of grateful offerings and manifestations of genuine belief. Their service ended, the old nachoda came back to me and said again :

“It was His care and kind benevolence alone which saved our souls, sahib. We were on the verge of sharing your fate and falling asleep of fatigue and exhaustion when Said, the most tenacious of men who ever sailed this sea, climbed the mast once more in an effort to spy some distant land. To the north there was nothing but water ; water surrounded us to the west as well as the east. Yet to the south his eyes spied a faint line of land which we must have passed during the previous night. At the very moment

our sails were set a slight south-westerly breeze came to our rescue. In three hours we reached the faint line of land, and, Allah be praised—it was Kamaran !”

Our days of hopeless drifting proved that we had run up against the elements and that it would have been suicidal to attempt to continue our journey even though Allah had come to our rescue once. I was told that a steamer *en route* to Jeddah in Saudi Arabia was expected in Kamaran within ten days, so I decided to abandon the dhow.

The men of the *Lucky* bade me a warm farewell and, as the same breeze which helped us into the bay carried them away towards the south, I stood on a sand-dune waving until the horizon swallowed the top of the mast.

Now I turned back to the civilized comforts with which the British Administration of the island had greeted me upon my arrival the day before. Kamaran was different from all the other places I had visited in the Red Sea. Along the shore of the bay was a row of cheerful houses which all seemed to smile a cordial greeting. The inhabitants, English and native alike, competed with one another in showering me with kindness and attention. Most important of all, however, was that nobody seemed to bother about such trivialities as a landing-permit or a visa, of which—as usual—I had none. It soon turned out that Kamaran is one of the places left in this harassed world where these blemishes of our civilization are completely unknown. The tiny, sandy island is nobody's preserve—it is the common property of all people who sail the Red Sea. The Turks had erected a gigantic quarantine station on its sands and ordered all ships carrying pilgrims *en route* to the holy places of the Hejaz to stop for medical examination. Then sanitary conditions in the ports of the Orient were backward and all the countries around the Sea overrun with infectious diseases ; much

credit is due to the Kamaran station for the success in preventing these diseases from being carried to Mecca and Medina. But nowadays European civilization has come to all the Red Sea ports ; the prospective pilgrims are vaccinated against all possible diseases, and it is rarely a steamer is discovered on which anyone is suffering from a contagious malady.

Kamaran remains a sentinel in the waters of the Sea. In a long row stand the barracks of the never-used modern quarantine station, always ready for any emergency. In neat little green bungalows live doctors and nurses, on the watch for the possibility which fortunately never seems to be realized. The island is administered jointly by British and Dutch authorities, although it is the property of neither country. It is really Yemeni territory, but the Imam renounced his right to the island in the interest of humanity, thus permitting the most efficient operation of the quarantine station. Being a virtual no man's land, everybody is a welcome guest at Kamaran.

At the head of the quarantine station's European staff is Captain David Thompson, former military attaché of the British Embassy at Teheran, Persia, who retired to this *sine cura* a few years ago. But he refused to live an idle life on his island kingdom. Even though the quarantine station failed to keep him busy, he found much to do to make this sea-lapped desert into a fair imitation of Paradise. In his house I enjoyed refrigerated drinks and all the comforts of an English country house. In his little Model "T" Ford I made interesting excursions from one end of the island to the other, visiting the people of Kamaran. Theirs is a never-ceasing struggle with the capricious sea and the burning sand; and the Captain has left nothing undone to make their lives easier to bear. He organized their pearl-fishing, saving his "subjects" from con-

tinually being cheated by the shrewd Hindu pearl collectors. He planted cotton at a well-irrigated spot and occupied most of the natives with road-building just to help them forget the adversities of idleness. They have the usual pride of islanders and consider themselves members of an exclusive race. Ever since Captain Thompson created his lost paradise for them they consider themselves more fortunate than all the other inhabitants of Felix Arabia.

The ten days spent on Kamaran gave me a complete recovery from the hardships of the dhow, and when the expected steamer arrived I was sorry to leave this unique island. In Kamaran, Arabia ended for me, and I was reintroduced into our own world, our own civilization. It was a departure burdened with the thought that the eternal riddle of Arabia was today remoter than ever from its solution. I found a people about to leave the ancient traditions of their forefathers and preparing to embark upon a new civilization—the European culture, which will assuredly upset the jealously guarded, centuries-old balance of the desert. Yet it is the European civilization of the nineteenth century, the culture of the poets and thinkers, which these Arab reformers mistake for the European civilization of the twentieth century. And while they celebrate the advent of their emancipation they find themselves confronted with the new European “culture” manifesting itself in guns and poison gas.

The conflict might end in either establishing the Europeans firmly in Arabia or possibly leading the Arabs back to Spain.